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DOCTORAL THESIS

Women's Boxing: An Investigation into Perceptions of the Female Fighter

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Bond University

Faculty of Health Sciences and Medicine

**Women's Boxing: An Investigation into Perceptions of the
Female Fighter**

By

Christine Aiken

**A dissertation submitted in total fulfilment of the
requirements of the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

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ABSTRACT

Active participation in sport can improve multiple aspects of the lives of girls and women, including mental, physical, and social health (Brown & Blanton, 2002; Lagerros, Hsieh, & Hsieh, 2004). Although sport participation has proven to be beneficial for women, there is a gap between the amount of athletic opportunities available to male and female athletes (Sabo & Veliz, 2012). One reason for this is the fact that Western society has historically prohibited and discouraged women from occupying spaces designated as masculine, and this includes the world of sport (Malcolm, 2003).

While women have entered this previously male-exclusive space, sport is an institution that naturalises gender more so than any other (Anderson, 2008a). One effect of sport's naturalisation of gender is the idea that certain sports are designated specifically for men, or specifically for women (Koivula, 2001). The media's coverage of sport also contributes to this notion through their at times gender biased reporting (Cooky, Messner, & Musto, 2015; McKay, 1991). Sports featuring contact, aggression, strength, and stamina are often recognised as masculine (Hardin & Greer, 2009). When women participate in these sports, it often exposes sexism and gender discrimination (Lindner, 2012). This is true for women in boxing, which is the focus of this thesis.

Women's boxing has grown significantly in recent years (Jennings, 2014), but research has shown that female boxers are subjected to trivialising and marginalising stereotypes and experience gender discrimination within the sport (Halbert, 1997). Research in the area of sport participation has found that negative feelings and experiences can damage the psychological connection a participant has with his or her

chosen sport (Beaton, 2010). The purpose of this study was to identify common perceptions of female boxers and how these perceptions are promulgated, and then understand how these perceptions affect the connection female boxers have with the sport.

This study relied on a socio-feminist perceptive of masculinity, which maintains that masculinity is produced through an intersection of institutional power, organisational culture, and individual agency (Anderson, 2005). Data were collected through an 18 month period of participant observation in a boxing gym in Queensland and 30 semi-structured, in-depth interviews. This was supplemented by data collected from media sources covering boxing events at the 2012 London Olympic Games. Data analysis used *a priori* codes to identify themes. The Psychological Continuum Model (PCM) (Funk & James, 2001) was used as a tool to better understand the relationship between female boxers and the sport.

The major findings of this study identified four common perceptions of female boxers: 1) female boxers as invisible; 2) female boxers as illegitimate athletes; 3) female boxers as unfeminine; and, 4) female boxers as sexualised characters. These perceptions were found to have both positive and negative effects on the psychological connections between female boxers and the sport. For some participants, the perceptions motivated them to demonstrate commitment to the sport while others were swayed towards ambivalence and possible disengagement. Lastly, this study found that hegemony at the institutional, organisational, and individual levels contribute to the promulgation of perceptions of female boxers and maintains their marginalisation and trivialisation within the sport. Implications for the sport's future development of a culture more receptive to inclusivity and growth are identified.

DECLARATION

This thesis is submitted to Bond University in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. This thesis represents my own original work towards this research degree and contains no material which has been previously submitted for a degree or diploma at this University or any other institution, except where due acknowledgment is made.

Signature:

Date: 15 April 2016

Christine Aiken

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Chapter I

Introduction

1. Introduction

Sport is a global phenomenon that plays a major role in understanding society and culture (Jarvie, 2012). Local and global economies are influenced by sport, and sport can produce positive impacts on income and employment (Blake, 2005; Kasimati, 2003). Cha (2009) illustrated the intersection of sport and politics and claims sport can offer opportunities for international relations, guide change within a nation, and shape a nation's identity to present to both its people and the world. Technology and sport have mutually contributed to the advancement of one another (Magdalinski, 2009), and artistic representations in film, music, and writing have integrated sport into many forms of cultural entertainment (Baker, 1998). Furthermore, sport has both influenced and been influenced by social policies, sentiments, and divisions, including race, gender, nationality, class, age, ability, and sexuality (Birrell & Richter, 1987; Carron, Hausenblas, & Mack, 1996; Loprinzi, Fitzgerald, & Cardinal, 2012; Wheaton, 2013).

With sport integrated into many aspects of culture and society, it is incorporated into the lives of many people, including by way of participation. The Australian Sport Commission (2015) reported nearly 6.5 million Australians participate in an organised form of sport, and 92% of adults have an interest in a minimum of one sport. In the United States, 209 million people over the age of six participate in some type of sport (Physical Activity Council, 2015). According to Allender, Cowburn, and Foster (2006), it is accepted that sports participation benefits physical health, psychological health, and general quality of life. Research supports this argument and many studies specifically highlight the benefits of participating in sport for girls and women (Heuser, 2005; Richman & Shaffer, 2000; Thorton, Sykes, Tang, 2004).

Active participation in sport can be beneficial to girls and women in multiple aspects of their lives. In regards to physical health, research supports the claim that

physically active lifestyles through sports participation reduce the risk of chronic diseases in women. For example, the findings of 23 studies indicate physically active young women are 20% less likely to get breast cancer when they are older (Lagerros, Hsieh, & Hsieh, 2004). Another study found college-aged female gymnasts had a higher bone density than women who participated in leisure activities, which is important because women with higher bone density are at lower risk for developing osteoporosis (Bareither, Grabiner, & Troy, 2008).

Female athletes also exhibit better health than female non-athletes because they are more likely to make lifestyle choices that contribute to their wellbeing. Ford (2008) found that female athletes were significantly less likely to use recreational drugs, such as prescription drugs, cocaine, marijuana, ecstasy, or opiates, than women not involved in sport. Also drug related, a study concluded female athletes who participated on at least one sports team were much less likely to smoke on a regular basis than female non-athletes (Melnick, Miller, Sabo, Farrell, & Barnes, 2001). Meanwhile, Lehman and Koerner (2004) found that female athletes were also found to put themselves at less sexual risk, as they are more likely to have protected sex, sex with fewer partners, and avoid sex under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

The benefits of sports participation in relation to mental health have also been highlighted. Studies show that female athletes are at a lower risk of suicidal behaviours, including considering, planning, or attempting suicide (Brown & Blanton, 2002; Brown, Galuska, Zhang, Lowry, Fulton, Maynard, & Eaton, 2005). Wyshak (2001) found that sports participation may have a long-term impact on mental health. This study found that female college athletes are only two-thirds as likely to be clinically depressed 10 years later as compared to female college non-athletes. Similarly, Richman and Shaffer (2000) found benefits of sports participation when they concluded that female athletes

have a better sense of positive body image than their peers. Additionally, female athletes have been shown to achieve a sense of belonging and community by participating in sports (Krane & Romont, 1997).

While the body of research provides evidence that sports participation is beneficial for girls and women, academic literature also demonstrates problematic issues that currently exist within women's sports. For example, female athletes are a demographic especially at risk for developing eating disorders or practicing unhealthy behaviours in order to control their weight (Petrie & Greenleaf, 2007). According to Greenleaf, Petrie, Carter and Reel (2009), this is because female athletes "not only face the typical social pressures to be thin, which all women in Western culture are exposed to, but they are also immersed in a social context that focuses on their bodies' appearance and performance" (p. 489). While this contradicts the previously mentioned study connecting positive body image and female athletes, it highlights the complexity of issues within the field of women's sports. The traits that are valued in sport, both physical and emotional traits, can conflict with the physical and mental traits that reflect traditional norms of femininity. This can present difficulties for female athletes, as they navigate gendered spaces in their everyday lives.

Another issue that exists in the world of sport and greatly affects the experiences of female athletes is the gap between the amount of athletic opportunities available to male and female athletes. Indeed, research shows that sport is still male dominated in terms of participants. In the U.S., sports participation opportunities increased for high school students between 2000 and 2010 (Sabo & Veliz, 2012). However, the same report showed that 41 athletic opportunities were available for every 100 female high school students, compared to 53 for every 100 male students by 2010. At the college level, the Women's Sports Foundation (2011) reported female athletes receive 63,000

fewer participation opportunities than male athletes. In Australia, a higher percentage of men participated in both recreational sport activities and organised sport than women from 2011-2012 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013). These findings indicate that even though it has been established that women benefit physically, socially, and mentally from participating in sport, they do not necessarily receive the same opportunities as men. Thus, a gender gap exists in sports participation rates.

A contributing factor for the differences in sports opportunities and participation rates for men and women is hegemonic beliefs of gender. The roles associated with males and female gender identities shift as societal attitudes and institutional parameters change (Lucal, 2011). The social construction of gender, which will be discussed in depth in Chapter II, results in the continuous modification of behavioural expectations of the sexes. Western society has historically prohibited and discouraged women from occupying spaces designated as masculine (Krane, Choi, Baird, Aimar, & Kauer, 2004). However, women have entered spaces that had been, and some that still are, designated as masculine, and there have been substantial changes in gendered expectations (Connell, 2002). These spaces include the world of sport (Blue, 1987; Malcolm, 2003).

Although it is possible for people in Western societies to take the availability of women's sport for granted, until relatively recently, sport was actually inaccessible to women. The Ancient Olympic Games, which happened from 776 B.C. to 394 A.D., not only barred women from competing, but from even spectating the events (Fuller, 1987). The birth of the Modern Olympic Games in 1896 saw major changes to the Olympic Games and sports. However, the exclusion of women remained consistent as Pierre de Coubertin, the founder of the Modern Olympic Games, did not allow women to compete, but relegated them to the duty of crowning the winners with garlands (Welch & Costa, 1994).

The most recent summer Olympic Games in London 2012 demonstrated the significant changes that have occurred in sport regarding women's participation. According to the International Olympic Committee (IOC) (2014), 4,676 female athletes competed in the 2012 London Olympic Games, which is an Olympic first. These women made up approximately 44% of the total athletes, and the inclusion of women's boxing allowed women to compete in all sports on the Olympic Programme for the first time. Furthermore, all National Olympic Committees (NOCs) had sent women to compete in the Games by 2012 (IOC, 2014).

These facts provide evidence that women's sport and female athletes have made significant progress in the institution of sport. The almost equal presence of female to male athletes at the most recent Summer Olympic Games gives the impression that sport has reached a level playing field in regards to gender. However, research indicates this is not the case. While girls and women are participating in sport in record numbers and making major athletic achievements, they have yet to receive equal treatment in terms of resources, opportunities, and portrayal (Fink, 2014). Weaver (2014) further argues that "sexism is prominent in elite sport and takes many forms" (p.758). When this gender discrimination is exposed, Western society rarely takes a stance to address these issues in a straightforward manner. This is especially true for women in contact sports, such as boxing (Lindner, 2012).

According to Sammons (1988), boxing has been one of the most popular and profitable professional sports and receives consistent media coverage. The appeal of boxing is further explained by Woodward (2014):

[Boxing] provokes enormous excitement and considerable interest. Boxing is distinctive in the field of sport. The phenomenon of one-on-one combat, in which the prime and explicit purpose is to render one's opponent unconscious,

seems to be an anomaly in the twenty-first century, a primordial practice and primitive source of entertainment (p. 1).

Audiences are attracted to boxing because it represents ideals of tradition and sport at its most basic form: two opponents engaging in physical combat with the intention of domination. The media builds upon this aspect of the sport and often creates narratives of warriors while highlighting concepts of struggle, adversity, and salvation (Cove & Young, 2007). However, these portrayals of warriors are gendered as popular media and sports coverage continue to promote the image of boxers as “redemptive [figures], self-made men who embody historically prized masculine values of strength, toughness, and determination” (Rhodes, 2011, p. 351). Despite the appeal of boxing and boxers, the attention directed at the sport remains focused on the male participants, which limits the opportunities, spaces, and success of female pugilists.

Although boxing has been used as a resource to promote social change in a variety of areas, this has not been the case with issues of gender. Boxing has largely ignored gender issues, and the sport is often depicted as an ultimate form of masculinity. Oates (1987) suggests boxing is a “stylised mimicry of a fight to the death” (p. 185) saturated in romanticised masculinity, which is one of the reasons why audiences are drawn to it. When thought of as a display of violence, women are automatically excluded because “aggression is a primary marker of sexual difference” (McCaughey, 1997, p. 2). Traditionally, boxing promoted “strength, agility, aggressiveness, independence, and courage” (Sammons. 1988, p. 54), which were considered beneficial for the development of men, but unnatural and harmful to women. The sport’s association with corruption and criminal activity also discouraged women’s participation. However, female boxers have fought inside and outside of the ring for the

right to compete in sanctioned bouts, and thousands of women around the world participate in boxing.

2. Background of the Issue

The historical study of sport plays a key role in interpreting and understanding contemporary and modern issues in sport (Jarvie, 2012). Therefore, it is worthwhile to investigate the history of women's presence and participation in boxing. Sugden (1996) argues that when boxing is conceptualised in its simplest form, which is two people fighting with their fists, it is one of the most ancient sports in existence. Since the sport originated, it has been made illegal and reinstated multiple times by different governments and governing bodies. Boxing has been a heavily contested sport and arguments have been made that it is dangerous and barbaric (Kaste, Vilkki, Sainio, Kuurne, Katevuo, & Meurala, 1982). These arguments are not only against the sport as a whole, but also who is allowed to participate.

Boxing was eradicated in Rome in the fourth century, and legalised boxing did not re-emerge until the eighteenth century in England (Sugden, 1996). This marked the birth of the sport as it is known today. Jack Broughton, a famous boxer and trainer, introduced the Broughton Rules in 1734 in order to "provide a standard for governing contests in the manly art of self-defence" (Greig, 1996, p. x). As the use of "manly" implies, these rules only addressed male fighters. Nevertheless, women participated in bouts, often bare-knuckled, and were well-received by audiences (Guttman, 1991). These matches, however, contrasted standards of acceptable female behaviour, as they were extremely violent. Furthermore, women's participation undermined the notion of boxing as a supreme display of masculinity because it showed that women could in fact box. Despite the popularity of women's fights among audiences, female pugilists were

described as “she-devils” and “Amazonian tigresses” and accused of lacking morals (Smith, 2014). English memoirist William Hickey described a female bout he observed in a bar in 1768:

Two she-devils, for they scarce had human appearance, engaged in a scratching and boxing match, their faces entirely covered with blood, bosoms bare, and the clothes nearly torn from their bodies. For several minutes not a creature interfered between them, or seemed to care a straw what mischief they might do each other, and the contest went with unabated fury (Hickey, 1913, p. 82).

Hickey’s account of the bout illustrates discomfort with the female fighters and highlights the violent, unregulated nature of these events.

The nineteenth century saw a decline in the popularity of women’s boxing in Britain. Boxing was increasingly identified as the “manly art,” and medical professionals were also spreading the idea that sports, especially contact sports, were both physically and mentally unsafe for women’s health (Smith, 2014). The popularity and promotion of boxing continued to grow in Britain, and women were encouraged to attend and watch sparring exhibitions in order to endorse the sport (Sammons, 1988). While women’s participation became even more rare in Britain, it gained popularity in France and Germany. Working class women participated in boxing matches at fairs, circuses and music halls, but were primarily forms of sexualised entertainment rather than sporting events (Guttman, 1991). Similar to the fight Hickey witnessed, these matches featured two women who “lit into each other, usually with their bare hands - scratching, pummelling, and tearing at each other’s clothes” (Guttman, 1991, p. 100). Although these bouts were bare-knuckle and did not follow a standard set of rules, they were still considered boxing.

It was also during the 1800s that boxing became formalised and gained popularity in North America. The late nineteenth century boxing scene mostly consisted of brutally violent fights that attracted rowdy crowds who often turned violent themselves (Sammons, 1988). Due to the nature of these events, women were not only discouraged from attending, but were actually not allowed to come to the fights. The wife of boxer Robert Fitzsimmons was forced to watch her husband's fight through a peephole while hiding in a room adjoining the arena in San Francisco in 1896 (Sammons, 1988). She made the news a year later when she openly attended her husband's match and was criticised for her attendance. A shift in the fight scene occurred in the early twentieth century when prizefighting became an acceptable, and even glamorous, social affair and more women came to these events (Boddy, 2013). Also in attendance were female journalists, such as Katharine Fullerton Gerould who wrote an accurate description of the first fight between Jack Dempsey and Gene Tunney in 1926, rather than admiring the demonstration of bravery and masculinity (Sammons, 1988). This inclusion of women, however, did not mean women were encouraged to appreciate the sport. Rather, they were encouraged to appreciate the fighters and their displays of masculinity (Boddy, 2013).

Although their participation was discouraged, women did in fact box in matches in North America during this time. For example, one of the first recorded women's bouts occurred in New York City in 1876 where two women fought for the prize of a silver butter dish (Cahn, 1994). These women were not only accused of engaging in "unladylike" behaviour, but as Cahn (1994) notes, were also formally charged with prostitution. Prizefighting was becoming the most popular form of entertainment, but women's fights were still rare and ridiculed when they occurred (Jennings, 2014). Women were still discouraged from participating in sport, as it was deemed

inappropriate and hazardous, and female pugilists were seen as especially deviant (Dowling, 2000).

Boxing became more organised in the 1880s and mostly resembled the sport it is today. The first governing bodies were formed and the Marquis of Queensbury Rules were introduced, which form the basis of modern boxing (Greig, 1996). Similar to the Broughton Rules, the Queensbury Rules only referred to male boxers, but they regulated the use of gloves, prohibited unlimited rounds, and standardised the size of the ring (Sugden, 1996). The implementation of rules and regulations led to the development of amateur boxing programs, as well as its inclusion at the St. Louis Olympic Games in 1904, which also featured women in a demonstrative exhibition match (Smith, 2014).

For most of the twentieth century, female boxers had to participate in informal, and often illegal, matches. These bouts were not popular and were not socially accepted for the most part (Halbert, 1997). However, these attitudes changed slightly during World War I when women assumed physically demanding occupations and were able to demonstrate their physical capabilities (Sammons, 1988). Women's boxing continued to gain some popularity in the 1930s and during World War II when women's sports in general experienced growth (Hargreaves, 1997). Opposition to women's boxing arose again after the war when women were encouraged to return to their traditional roles.

Women continued to box despite social disapproval, and the first televised women's fight was shown in the U.S. in 1954 (Smith, 2014). The contradiction of women and boxing became a fascinating concept and was adopted in popular culture outside of the ring. Female boxers were featured on television programs and game shows (Smith, 2014). The 1970s saw a surge in the popularity of women's boxing. In the U.S, Cathy "Cat" Davis became quite popular as a professional boxer. Many of her fights were televised, and she appeared on the cover of *Ring* magazine in 1978

(Jennings, 2014). Davis' popularity transcended the boxing world, and she became a symbol for those involved in the feminist movement of the time. This decade also saw the implementation of Title IX (Chepko & Couturier, 2001), which contributed to the growing interest in women's boxing. However, the sport of women's boxing was heavily criticised when it was revealed that several of Davis' matches had been fixed. Women's boxing declined in popularity and few female boxers emerged in the 1980s. However, a significant turning point came in 1988 when Sweden became the first country to lift the ban on women's amateur boxing and allow women to participate as amateur boxers (Jennings, 2014). Other countries followed this lead, and female participation in the sport increased.

The real boom of women's boxing took place in the 1990s when the sport reached its peak in popularity. This coincided with the growing popularity of women's sports in general, as the Women's National Basketball League was founded and the 1999 FIFA Women's World Cup captured the attention of the US (Spencer & McClung, 2001). There was a significant increase in women entering boxing gyms in the early 1990s, and these women were treated as athletes as they discovered they, "actually enjoy and are good at the real thing" (Sugden, 1996, p. 193). In 1992, Gail Grandchamp won her battle to box in the Massachusetts Golden Gloves amateur competition. A State Superior Court judge ruled that it was illegal to deny someone the right to box based on gender. This case had been in court for eight years. Unfortunately, Grandchamp was not able to fight in the competition as she had passed the age of 36, which is the maximum age for amateur fighters in the event (Women Boxing Archive Network, 1998). The ruling, however, is still significant as it ensured the right to compete for female amateur fighters.

Another key moment in women's boxing took place in 1993 when fifteen-year-old Dallas Malloy became the first woman to challenge USA Boxing in federal court. Malloy's goal was to compete against other women in the Olympic Games, which was only possible as a member of USA Boxing. The organisation, however, banned women from joining. The American Civil Liberties Union recruited attorney Suzanne Thomas to take on the case, and it went to court in March 1993. In May, a judge granted Malloy a court injunction, which temporarily nullified USA Boxing's ban on women until the case could go to trial. The president of the organisation claimed that the ban was in place because of safety and medical issues, but later decided not to pursue the matter. Malloy was granted the right to compete and won her bout in the first sanctioned amateur match between women in the United States (Women Boxing Archive Network, 1998). Shortly after her fight, Malloy quit boxing in order to pursue other goals. The public criticised her decision to leave the sport after such an immense effort to be able to participate (Owens, 2012). Her efforts, however, allowed 54 female boxers to register with USA Boxing and compete in sanctioned amateur matches (Jennings, 2014).

The 1990s also saw the emergence of several big name female boxers in the professional scene. Laila Ali, the daughter of Muhammad Ali, and Jackie Frazier-Lyde, the daughter of Joe Frazier, both began successful boxing careers in this decade (Women Boxing Archive Network, 1998). Christy Martin became known as the person who "legitimised" women's boxing and appeared on the cover of *Sports Illustrated* in 1997 (Smith, 2014.). Mia St. John became well known in the boxing world when she won her first fight by knockout and gained national attention by being on the undercard of Oscar De La Hoya fights. However, St. John was criticised by people in the boxing industry when she posed nude for *Playboy* magazine in order to "show she was feminine as well as an athlete." The boxing press began to refer to her as the "Bunny

Boxer” (Women Boxing Archive Network, 1998). Despite the criticism from the boxing community, this decade saw many female boxers promote themselves in a glamorised and sexualised manner, and some promoters continued to stage what were referred to as “cheesecake,” or gimmicky, matches (Smith, 2014).

Today, boxing has three international governing bodies: the British Boxing Board of Control, the European Boxing Union, and the Nevada State Athletic Commission. There are also four sanctioning bodies, which grant titles, and these are: the International Boxing Federation (IBF), World Boxing Association (WBA), World Boxing Council (WBC), and World Boxing Organization (WBO). Both the governing and sanctioning bodies oversee professional boxing, which means fighters compete for a monetary prize known as a purse. Each of these sanctioning bodies features a women’s section, recognises women’s world championship matches, and oversees events in over 100 countries (Women Boxing Archive Network, 2010). In 2014, there were 1,118 world ranked active professional female boxers (WIBF, 2015).

Amateur boxing, including Olympic events, world championships, and university sport, is regulated by the Amateur International Boxing Association (AIBA). Like the professional bodies, the AIBA also oversees women’s boxing (Woodward, 2014). At the amateur level, approximately 11,000 female boxers currently participate (WIBF, 2015). According to USA Boxing (2015), approximately 3,000 female boxers register with the organisation each year. In one of the biggest milestones for female boxers, women’s boxing made its Olympic debut at the 2012 London Olympic Games (Boxing , 2012). This was an incredibly significant moment for the sport because women’s boxing was finally featured on the biggest stage in global sport. A spike in female participation occurred after this event, which was reflected in a 30% increase in participation at the 2013 Women’s Junior/Youth World Boxing Championships (Smith,

2014). The Olympic debut of women's boxing not only produced visibility and an increase in participation, but offered a new way to think about female boxers as respectable, elite athletes, as well (Woodward, 2013). Another milestone followed when the women's boxing was included in the Commonwealth Games for the first time in 2014 (Glasgow 2014, 2014).

While women's boxing has progressed significantly since the days of bare-fisted women scratching and pummelling each other, issues of "poor promotional opportunities, minimal media exposure, and low pay were (and are) pervasive in the sport, as are continued mismatches, [and] a plethora of competing boxing organisations" (Smith, 2014, p. 261). The concept of the female boxer has been embraced as a means of sexualised entertainment and an advertisement tool, but not as a serious athlete (Hargreaves, 1997). This phenomenon of sexualising and trivialising women's boxing continues to occur, as seen in Figure 1.1. The progression of women's boxing has not been a linear process, and while the right to participate at both the professional and amateur levels has been obtained, female boxers are subjected to sexist practices due to the continual association of masculinity with boxing (Cove & Young, 2007; Halbert, 1997; Hargreaves, 1997; Lafferty & McKay, 2004). As Jennings (2014) points out, female boxers are recognised as women boxers, not simply boxers. The recent growth of women's boxing and persistent displays of gender inequality towards female boxers indicate that the area deserves further investigation.



Figure 1.1. A promotional poster for a women's boxing event featuring nude women (Foxy Boxing, 2013).

3. Justification for the Study

This study is useful for the sport of boxing, and particularly women's boxing, for multiple reasons. One reason is the timing of this study, which coincides with the recent increase in attention directed at female boxers. Women's boxing has recently made several debuts on the world stage, including the Guadalajara 2011 Pan American Games, London 2012 Olympic Games, and Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games. With growing participation rates, opportunities, media and public attention, the opportunity to address issues within the sport can and should be taken.

Furthermore, women's combat sports are gaining popularity and exposure. In 2004, women's freestyle wrestling was featured in the Olympic Games for the first time (Jennings, 2014). Women's mixed martial arts (MMA) came into the spotlight when the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC), which is the largest and most popular professional MMA organisation, introduced a women's bantamweight division in 2012 and followed with a women's strawweight division in 2014 (The UFC, 2015). The UFC even featured female contenders and coaches on the television show *The Ultimate Fighter: Team Rousey vs. Team Tate* and a cast of all female strawweight contenders on *The Ultimate Fighter: A Champion Will Be Crowned*.

Despite some advances, the history of women's sport demonstrates that obstacles face female athletes when they enter and occupy spaces that had previously been designated as masculine. As women continue to enter these spaces, and do so while gaining global attention, the sports world can utilise the chance to promote women's boxing and create changes to develop the sport in a positive manner. As previously discussed, sport has been proven to be beneficial to women, and the ability to offer another form of sport, in this case boxing, can positively impact both women and sport.

This study of women's boxing is also justified because there is evidence that social perceptions affect athletes' experiences and behaviours. Knight and Giuliano (2003) suggest that audiences create perceptions of athletes, which are often heavily influenced by media portrayals, and this can cause audiences to hold stereotypes concerning gender, sexuality, and personalities. One example of this is the phenomenon of perceiving female athletes as masculine simply for participating in sport. This has been found to affect female athletes as they make an effort to exaggerate their femininity to compensate, or apologise for, this perceived masculinity (Malcolm, 2003).

This is especially true for female athletes participating in male dominated sports, such as boxing. According to Halbert (1997), female boxers are aware of multiple stereotypes applied to them concerning their appearances, sexuality, and personality traits. The female boxers interviewed in her study perceived these stereotypes as negative and made conscious efforts to negate them by altering their looks and behaviours. This presents the question: if female boxers are aware of and affected by social perceptions, is the growth and development of the sport of women's boxing also affected?

By affecting the feelings, actions, and experiences of female boxers, it is possible that social perceptions affect the relationship these women have with the sport. The Psychological Continuum Model (PCM) provides a framework to understand an individual's psychological connection with a sport or sports team (Funk & James, 2006). Funk and James (2001) designed a continuum consisting of four categories, which are: awareness, attraction, attachment, and allegiance. The model offers a guide to understand how an individual transitions from introduction to allegiance to a sport. Beaton (2010) suggested an additional category of ambivalence be added to the PCM to describe another possible connection an individual may have with a sport. An ambivalent relationship with a sport would consist of an individual feeling like he or she could take it or leave it. This stage is significant because feelings of ambivalence can encourage a participant to disengage from the sport. For young sports that are still developing, such as women's boxing, the disengagement of participants can have a large impact on the sport's growth. Therefore, it is advisable to investigate the relationship female boxers have with the sport and how these relationships may affect the development of women's boxing. Since it has been established that it is a significant time for women's boxing, as it is growing in visibility and participation, this thesis investigates and answers the following questions:

- **How do female boxers believe they are perceived by others?**
- **How are these perceptions of female boxers created and promulgated?**
- **In what ways do these perceptions affect female boxers' level of connection with the sport?**

4. Summary

This chapter provided background information of some key issues in women's sport. The institution of sport influences and is influenced by multiple aspects of society, including gender beliefs. Although it has been established that women benefit from participation in sport, there is a gap in athletic opportunities and participation rates between men and women. Additionally, female athletes face obstacles, such as discrimination and gendered criticism, which their male counterparts do not. An example of this is women's participation in boxing. The next chapter provides a deeper exploration of concepts of gender and sport in an extensive literature review.

Chapter II

Review of Literature

1. Introduction

This thesis is concerned with developing a deeper understanding of ways in which female boxers are perceived, how these perceptions are created and recreated, and how these perceptions affect the development of women's boxing. Due to its presence in daily life, the concept of gender is often taken for granted as non-negotiable. However, gender, as well as sex, is a subjective notion that varies from culture to culture and is undergoing constant change. This is exemplified in the institution of sport. Gender plays a critical role in how sport is perceived and valued in a society, and the reverse is true, as well. Contact sports have historically been male dominated and used to reinforce notions of masculinity. This, in turn, generates concepts of femininity and contributes to the hegemonic binary of gender. The recent growth of women's sport, however, has called attention to the traditional gender values usually upheld in sport.

This chapter is a review of literature in the areas of gender and sport. First, the social construction of gender is discussed. This explores socio-feminist theory, which offers an explanation of how masculinity is produced. Next, the ways in which sport and gender influence each other is explored, and this includes the role of the media in creating and reinforcing hegemonic gender values. And last, the Psychological Continuum Model (PCM) is discussed as a framework to understand participants' connections with their chosen sport.

2. Sex and Gender

Although the differentiation between sex and gender is often viewed as a given in the social sciences, it was not until the feminist movements of the latter twentieth century that previously established beliefs were challenged (Franklin, 2012). At their basic definitions, sex is marked by physiological traits and gender is a cultural

distinction determined by set categories (Pronger, 1999). Sex is a label determined by biology, and in Western society, individuals are designated as male or female based on external and internal sex organs. These sex markers are determined by chromosomes, with males usually possessing XY sex chromosomes and females possessing XX sex chromosomes (Wood, 2012). The emphasis on biological dimensions cannot be entirely separated from the social constraints used to differentiate sex and gender. Biology plays a role in how a person develops, but does not determine personality traits, behaviours, and mannerisms; nor does it give meaning to cultural values and beliefs. Social expectations of masculinity and femininity are sometimes based on biological realities, such as the association of women and domestic duties due to their ability to become pregnant (Lips, 2013). While the body is closely associated with the classification of sex, it also plays a role in the creation and regulation of genders (Mennesson, 2000). Thus, the concepts of sex and gender are intertwined and influence the characterisations that define the categories within each construction.

While sex is focused on an individual's biological make-up, gender is based on social constructions and individual expression. Wood (2012) argues the concept of gender is much more complex than sex because it changes over both time and space. While a person's sex is classified at birth and usually remains constant throughout life, a person learns how to act in a manner that exemplifies gender over the course of a life span. However, gender is not uniquely personal, but "grows out of cultural ideas that stipulate the social meaning and expectation of each sex" (Wood, 2012, p. 22). It is these cultural ideas that constantly produce and reinforce hegemonic notions of gender and what is considered normal. It becomes difficult to perceive a particular gender in another way, and therefore, anything that deviates from what is expected is viewed as abnormal.

Individuals learn how to exemplify gender, usually from birth, as they are encouraged to adopt traits that conform to societal ideals. Social constructionism theorises that a person is shaped by social processes and experiences (Franklin, 2012). This means that a person's values and beliefs are constructed and rationalised through his or her experiences within a society; they are not inherent characteristics of a person. An individual then projects these beliefs and values through expressions and actions. Leaper (2000) uses this idea to explain that gender is not a piece of identity or personality, but something that people 'do.' Gender is 'done' through the use of the body, social interactions, language, clothing, actions, and displays of emotion, and not only by the person 'doing' gender, but by those recognising the embodiment, as well (Lorber, 1994). This implies that gender is not a guaranteed assumption; it is an achievement obtained through various identifying factors. Ultimately, gender is a performance.

According to Butler (2006):

Acts, gestures, and desires produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this *on the surface* of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organising principle of identity as a cause. Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means. (p. 185; italics in original)

In other words, gender is a social construction that only exists "on the surface." While the social construction of gender creates the belief that gender is a static, inherent part of an individual, gender is actually a performance that is understood by audiences. It is

understood through discursive means, and therefore, the binary concepts of masculine and feminine are not stable.

Furthermore, it should be noted, however, that displays of gender do not always align with gender identity. Wood (2013) defines gender identity as the personal consciousness of an individual's sex, or one's own identification as male or female. Gender displays, on the other hand, are what others construe as a presented identity (Lucal, 2011). It is this perceived gender that has the greater influence on one's social identity and interactions. Because of this, individuals, especially those who negotiate the boundaries of a binary male/female ideology, are usually constantly aware of the displays they present and what gender their audiences interpret. Western society's dominant beliefs expect sex, gender identity, gender perception, and sexual orientation to align with heteronormative values (Wood, 2013). Therefore, people who do not demonstrate consistency throughout these spaces are viewed as failing to appropriately reproduce and reinforce the gender regime and are stigmatised and subjected to social consequences.

Social constructionism also supports the intertwinement of sex and gender because of the significance of the body. One reason for this is the fact that an individual cannot 'do' gender without having a body to do it with (Cromby, 2007). Furthermore, the body is in the action of 'doing' gender while simultaneously absorbing the social cues it goes on to project. It is also the body and sex designation that greatly influence what gender identity an individual chooses, or is encouraged, to 'do.' Gender develops from societal ideas regarding the meanings and expectations of each sex, and therefore, a person is subjected to cultural influences based upon prescribed sex. Also, it is typical for Western society to associate sex, gender, and sexual orientation as consistent with

social norms. It is presumed that sex automatically correlates with approved gender and heterosexuality practices (Glover & Kaplan, 2009).

2.1. Evidence of Sex and Gender as Social Constructs

Gender as a social construct is supported by research regarding the various ways it is interpreted in different cultures, places, and times. American cultural anthropologist Margaret Mead (1969) highlighted the subjectiveness of gender, particularly concepts of masculinity and femininity, when she published her findings about distinct gender patterns among three indigenous tribes in Papua New Guinea. Not only did these findings present gender ideals different to those in Western societies, but between the Papua New Guinean communities, as well. Studies about Native American tribes have also revealed alternate notions of gender. Some Native American communities recognise more than two genders, including male, female, and a third gender incorporating both masculine and feminine traits (Nanda, 2011). Additionally, those who are perceived as the third gender category are not marginalised, but rather, held in high standing. Gender can also vary among communities within a single society. For example, Collins (1998) claims gender identifying characteristics differ among racial and ethnic groups in the United States.

Time is also used to indicate how gender is socially constructed, as meanings adjust as other areas of society change. One example of this is the changes that occurred after the Industrial Revolution, which created a division of labour as work and home were increasingly separated (Risman & Godwin, 2001). Men and masculinity became redefined as emotionally reserved and earning an income, while women and femininity were redefined as more nurturing and financially dependent. Kimmel (1994) also addresses how time influences concepts of gender as an individual ages and progresses

through different stages of life. The ways in which boys and girls demonstrate masculinity and femininity are different than the gender displays of men and women. Masculinity and femininity are measured by a different set of values. This signifies not only how the meanings of gender concepts change, but also how one's personal gender identity changes over time, as well.

While previous research supports the claim that gender is a social construct, Western society's recent changes in gender beliefs also demonstrate the subjective definitions of gender. The introduction of the term androgyny in the 1970s exemplifies the rethinking of gender as a strictly masculine and feminine binary (Wood, 2013). The word androgyny combines the Greek words for "man" and "woman," and androgynous individuals display characteristics with both masculine and feminine definitions. This acknowledges the possibility of altering the lines between masculinity and femininity, as well as navigating the space between the binary. In today's society, many men and women do not limit themselves solely to the qualities associated with their gender identity. Research has found that androgynous individuals have more self-esteem than single sex-typed people (Heilbrun, 1986) and are more fulfilled in their professional and personal lives (Heath, 1991).

The recent social recognition of intersexed, transsexual, and transgendered people also contributes to the social construction of gender, as well as sex. While intersexed people possess both male and female biological characteristics, transsexuals have had medical intervention, such as surgery, hormone treatments, or both, to allow their bodies to match their personal sex identity (Devor, 1997). However, many transsexual people must learn gender after they have transitioned from one sex to the other. American professor Deirdre McCloskey (1999), a male to female transsexual person, explains how she had to learn to be feminine after her surgery. This included a

process of studying the mannerisms of women, such as postures and gestures, and practicing them until they became a part of her everyday life. Transgendered individuals are people who do not match their biologically prescribed sex with their gender identity (Looy & Bouma, 2005). While transgendered people, as well as those perceived to be transgendered, have historically faced social isolation, recent institutional changes have indicated a shift from a dualistic gender regime. Tilsley (2010) reports that approximately 300 U.S. universities have incorporated gender identity into their non-discrimination policies, and several of them also offer gender-neutral housing for transgendered students.

The significance of the social and institutional acknowledgment of intersexed, transsexual, and transgendered people is that it challenges the conventional Western gender dichotomy. The notion that sex and gender are consistently stable and exist only as male and female, masculine and feminine is questioned as alternatives are produced (Namaste, 2000). Moreover, people who do not identify within the traditional categories of male and female unsettle the notion that sex, gender, and sexual orientation automatically align with heteronormative conformity. The recognition of individuals who do not identify within the categories of male or female, but rather, a third space illustrates the changing nature of sex and gender. Masculine and female boundaries are in fact capable of alteration, blurring, and erasing.

2.2. Socio-feminist Theory of Masculinity

With gender established as a social construct, the next step to understanding gender is to examine how it is constructed. Wood (2013) defines culture as structures or institutions, and practices or actions, which produce a specific social order, which is then upheld and reproduced by regulating values, meanings, and behaviours. Thus,

gender is produced through the interactions of multiple levels of institutions, communities, and individuals. These gender orders, however, are connected because, “people in their daily lives routinely move in, out and across different gender regimes – families, workplaces, schools, places, of worship, and community activities” (Messner & Bozada-Deas, 2009, p. 52). A socio-feminist perspective also accommodates the idea that gender regimes vary depending on the nature of the organisation and individual. This is because a socio-feminist perspective suggests masculinity is, “produced through a complex interaction of institutional power, organisational culture, and individual agency” (Anderson, 2008, p. 259).

Gender relations do not simply exist as productions of major institutions; they are an integral component to their systematic structures. Connell (1987) argues that all social institutions have a gender regime, which is the current operation of gender relations within that particular institution. Gender relations are illustrated by the institution’s division of labour and power, actions constructing masculinity and femininity, and ideologies about sexual behaviour. For example, in a sport context, Messner and Bozada-Deas (2009) identified how gender segregation occurs among adult volunteers in youth sports. Male volunteers often became coaches while female volunteers usually became “team moms,” which was naturalised and justified by gendered divisions of labour in familial institutions. Institutional gender relations can be easy to identify in some cases, but less so in others. Connell (2002) explains gender regimes are constantly being reproduced and therefore, gender relations are always changing. Social institutions are capable of change, whether gradual or rapid, that can alter gender divisions and orders, and sport is an example of this (Messner & Bozada-Deas, 2009).

According to Schein (1990), “culture is what a group learns over a period of time as that group solves its problems of survival in an external environment and its problems of internal integration” (p. 111). This is achieved through a simultaneously behavioural, cognitive, and emotional process. Culture manifests within an organisation through observable artefacts, values, and basic underlying assumptions (Schein, 1990).

Second-wave feminism called attention to the gender orders that exist and are produced within organisations (Acker & Van Houten, 1974). Prior to this, organisational culture had been viewed through a gender-neutral discourse despite the implementations of clearly gendered practices. Acker (1990) claims organisational practices, such as income inequality between men and women, are a contributor to the gendered division of labour, as well as the status of inequality within that division. Additionally, organisations create meanings of gender that are circulated and reproduced in a contained environment, but also influence a larger cultural image. Gender identity is also affected by the gendered practices of organisational culture. As people spend significant time in an organisation, they adopt behaviours and beliefs that ultimately influence their gender roles in other areas of their lives (Acker, 1990).

Individual agency is, “the capacity of individuals to make decision concerning all main aspects of their lives in ways that are neither completely constrained nor completely without reference to social, economic and family circumstances” (Evans & Strauss, 2010, p. 820). In other words, it is the exercise of choice and the power to intervene in a state of affairs (Carr, 1998). However, Billett (2009) states that individual agency is not entirely separate from social guidance. In other words, an individual’s choices are influenced by their past social and cultural experiences. In regards to gender identity, Carr (1998) uses the example of “tomboys,” or girls who exhibit skills and

traits usually associated with boys, to demonstrate the role of individual agency in creating gender identity.

2.3. Hegemony and Gender

In Western society, gender is perceived as a binary concept, as it has two established categories of male and female as the norm. Bradley (1996) defines gender as, “the varied and complex arrangements between men and women, encompassing the organization of reproduction, the sexual divisions of labour and cultural definitions of masculinity and femininity” (p. 205). Although the changing perceptions of gender have led to the exploration of a widening field of gender categories, the male/female duality remains the dominant belief. This means that gender is a relational concept. Masculinity and femininity are defined in relation to each other and understood as contrasts (Wood, 2013). In other words, femininity is a counterpoint to masculinity and vice versa. Their dependency on one another also means that as one concept of gender changes, the other will change, as well.

The gender classifications of male and female are not simply a binary, but also a hierarchy. Feminist studies often address the patriarchal structure of Western society (Barrett & McIntosh, 2005; Connell, 1987; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Donaldson, 1993; Kennedy, 2008; Weedon, 1987). This structure allows society to exist on a system that gives men power while women are placed in subordinate positions. Access to and divisions of labour in educational institutions, the workplace, and the household have all been designed to benefit the interests of men. Different types of feminism have challenged the patriarchal structure and provide multiple solutions for the empowerment of women (Weedon, 1987). Liberal feminism (Burke, 2010; Connell, 1987; Duncan & Brummett, 1993) seeks equal opportunity for women without dramatic change to the

established social system. Radical feminism (Connell, 1987; Duncan & Brummett, 1993) calls for the separation of women from men and the existing patriarchal structure so that women and femininity are not devalued in any way. Socialist feminism (Barrett & McIntosh, 2005; Kennedy, 2008) addresses the intersection of gender, racial, and socioeconomic discrimination, and therefore, determines a need for an entirely new social system.

However, the patriarchal structure of Western society is still in place, and, therefore, hegemonic masculinity is a key factor in the maintenance of popular gender beliefs. Much of the literature on hegemonic masculinity turns to Gramsci's (1972) use of hegemony in explaining how dominant groups maintain power (Connell, 1987; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Donaldson, 1993; McKay, 1991). Hegemony incorporates a process that utilises "subtle ideological persuasion" during which subordinate communities consent to the values of their oppressors (McKay, 1991). In order to maintain positions of power, hegemonic groups shape their values to be accepted as beneficial to everyone. For example, the idea that men should receive higher salaries in order to support their families appeals to women because they believe they will benefit from their husbands' higher incomes. Connell (1987) also acknowledges that hegemony does not destroy alternatives. Instead, it subordinates and devalues them. Thus, hegemony is not achieved by force, but by rooting the ideas of the dominant into the consciousness of the oppressed. The ideology of the ruling group is accepted as the norm (Donaldson, 1993). Disrupting hegemony is a difficult task, as it is an ongoing process to maintain power. Also, hegemonic beliefs become part of unconscious levels of thoughts and are rooted in language, everyday practices, and all institutional areas including education, religion, politics, sports, law, and the media

(McKay, 1991). Williams (2005) argues that these values, meanings, and practices become instilled as “common sense” for most people.

The male position of power over females can be explained through the theory of hegemonic masculinity. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) explain this concept as the process in which men are able to maintain control over women, as well as some men over other men. This power is not accomplished by physical force, but conceived through cultural processes, such as religious practice, media exposure, the division of labour, and, importantly for this research, sports (Connell, 1987). A masculinity becomes hegemonic when it has been accepted as “common sense” by most aspects of Western society.

Because hegemonic masculinity maintains men in a dominant position, all men are automatically granted the benefits by simply belonging in this group. Although hegemonic masculinity does not take into account other forms of masculinity, it is the peak of maleness (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). It is defined by heterosexuality, breadwinning, wealth, and toughness, and though not all men practice it, almost all benefit from it (Donaldson, 1993). Therefore, men are expected to strive for this type of manhood, and society is exposed to this image through the “naturalised form of the hero” (Donaldson, 1993), such as the male sporting hero.

According to Connell (1987), “[t]he meanings in the bodily sense of masculinity concern, above all else, the superiority of men to women, and the exaltation of hegemonic masculinity over other groups of men, which is essential to the domination of women. The social definition of men as holders of power is translated not only to mental body images and fantasies, but also into muscle tensions, posture, the feel and texture of the body” (p. 85). The physical body is a means of achieving hegemonic masculinity, and therefore, the sport plays a central role in the ability to display the

physical and mental traits of hegemonic masculinity. A football star depicts hegemonic masculinity, as he exhibits physical strength, mental toughness, provides for his family, leads his team into battle, and sacrifices his body. It is for these reasons that boxing is a sport that particularly reinforces hegemonic masculinity.

According to Woodward (2014), [t]he mix of enfolded practices and economic, political, social and cultural forces makes boxing a productive site for the reiteration and performance of hegemonic masculinities” (p. 152). It is the combination of male dominance, values of masculinity, focus on physical strength and violence that make boxing a particular site for the production and reproduction of hegemonic masculinity. The production and circulation of hegemonic masculinity is present in the language, social and cultural connections, and embodied practices of the sport that are all classified male.

Although masculinity is an evolving concept, hegemonic masculinity continues to dominate Western society’s expectancies of men and is rewarded through positions of power (Young & White, 2000). However, there is not a hegemonic femininity to counter hegemonic masculinity. Connell’s (1987) concept of “emphasised femininity” offers a widely accepted form of femininity that centres on women’s compliance and subordination to men. Similar to hegemonic masculinity, it is heavily promoted through societal practices. Emphasised femininity naturalises the ideas of women as nurturing and their duties to tend to men’s needs.

3. Gender and Sport

These notions of hegemonic masculinity and emphasised femininity have influenced Western society’s perception of sport. It is the “institution in which gender is most naturalized” (Anderson, 2008, p. 260) and illustrates a “culture of differences,” or

how women are identified by how they are different to men (Couturier & Chepko, 2001). Although Anderson's (2008) claim is a subjective statement, sport does indeed shape society's views of gender in ways that naturalise gender norms, expectations, and dynamics. While institutions such as marriage, religion, and education also naturalise gender, the universality of sport makes it that much more powerful in its ability to shape the meanings people give to gender. While sports have historically been used as means to highlight the superiority of men, women's sports are an "important step to evoking social change because they promote an awareness of women's physical strength and foster a spirit of self-awareness" (Jarvie, 2005, p. 353).

Gender roles in sport have become normalised in popular culture, and therefore, society rarely questions why men and women participate in certain sports and not others. Sport, especially team and contact sports, have long been associated with masculinity. The Muscular Christianity movement of the late nineteenth century began the association of moral righteousness with physical activity (Couturier & Chepko, 2001). Exercise and sport were viewed as a way to teach boys to be "manly" and instil Christian values. Pierre de Coubertin, the founder of the modern Olympic Movement, applied the notion of Muscular Christianity to the Olympic Games (Kluka, 2001). During this period, science was also used as a mechanism to exclude women from sport. The conservation of energy principle stated that women must not waste energy so they do not stress their reproductive systems (Couturier & Chepko, 2001). This supported the belief that women were physically not capable of participating in sport while men were biologically designed to.

As women slowly began to enter the sports world, they were designated to activities that were deemed socially acceptable for the female physique, such as fencing, swimming and tennis (Kluka, 2001). Women participated in these events at the 1924

Paris Olympics, but were accompanied by media coverage that presented them as undesirable to men and unnatural. In the 1928 Amsterdam Olympics, the women's 800 metre track final featured women passing out after they crossed the finish line. This event was used as evidence that sport was physically damaging to women, and the 800 metre race was banned from the Olympics until 1960 (Kluka, 2001). The idea that certain sports are designated for men or women continues in Western society today. Sports featuring contact, heavy objects, teamwork, and stamina are often recognised as masculine (Hardin & Greer, 2009). These sports include American football and ice hockey. On the other hand, sports that demonstrate grace and beauty, such as figure skating and gymnastics, are perceived as feminine (Hardin & Greer, 2001). While women and men are legally able to participate in all types of sport, social stigma continues to influence what sports they choose to play.

The issue of sexuality has also played a role in influencing perceptions of sport in regards to gender. In the 1950s, Freud's theories of sexuality and lesbianism were embraced by society and fear of being identified as lesbians became a grave concern for women in sport (Couturier & Chepko, 2001). Since many sports were still deemed masculine, women who participated in them were seen as acting unnaturally. Thus, they were automatically assumed to be lesbians, and this was presented as a negative, almost unnatural phenomenon.

Butler's (2006) theory of the heterosexual matrix can be used to elaborate on the connection between female athletes and notions of lesbianism. The heterosexual matrix is a model that allows a viewer to assume another individual's sexuality when his or her sex and gender are known variables. According to Butler (2006):

The term heterosexual matrix... [designates] that grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, genders, and desires are naturalised. I... characterise a

hegemonic discursive/epistemic model of gender intelligibility that assumes that for bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender (masculine expresses male, feminine expresses female) that is oppositionally and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality (p. 208).

In other words, individuals are viewed through a visual gaze as a particular sex and gender, which falls into the binaries of male/female and masculine/feminine. Once these variables are determined, the viewer prescribes a particular sexuality for the gazed upon individual. This is another binary understanding of heterosexual/homosexual. For example, a woman who is viewed as feminine is assumed to be heterosexual. On the other hand, a woman who is viewed as masculine is assumed to be homosexual. Although this binary understanding of sex, gender, and sexuality is problematic, it is how most people make sense of others.

The heterosexual matrix can be applied to sport and the ways in which female athletes are viewed in regards to gender and sexuality. Audiences see female athletes and understand their sex to be female, but see them performing in ways that do not prescribe to traditional displays of femininity. Therefore, audiences often assume female athletes are lesbians. However, Tredway (2014) pointed out the limitations of the heterosexual matrix in women's sport in her research on an "out," or openly gay, female tennis player. This study investigated the ways in which Amelie Mauresmo's, a gay professional tennis player, gender was portrayed one the variable of her sexuality was confirmed. In other words, her sex and sexuality were known as stable components to viewers, but her gender remained was not. Tredway (2014) found that focus shifted to Mauresmo's muscular physique after she came out as gay, which was an attempt to socially construct her as masculine due to her rejection of heterosexuality. Thus,

viewers still try to make sense of a person's sex, gender, and sexuality within the understandings of the heterosexual matrix even when the known variables change.

While the heterosexual matrix helps to explain the lack of female participation in sport in the mid-twentieth century, the 1960s and the Feminist Movement brought significant change to women's sport. Title IX was passed in 1972, which made it illegal for educational institutions to discriminate on the basis on gender (Chepko & Couturier, 2001). While the act was not aimed specifically at sport, it carried a huge impact not only in terms of participation rates, but in the perception of women's sport, as well. Before the passage of Title IX, men's intercollegiate sport was becoming more structured and competitive. Women's sport, however, was still viewed as a recreational activity by many institutions (Grant & Darley, 2001). College sports began to take women's sport more seriously after Title IX was implemented, and female athletes were able to demonstrate their abilities on a larger stage.

The growing presence of women in sport challenges the previously discussed concepts of gender that continue to exist in sport. One example of a growing sport that highlights the seemingly contrasting notions of hypersexualised femininity and physical masculinity is roller derby. Recent research on roller derby has found that it is a space that, "reinscribes a sexualised hyperfemininity while unproblematically adopting masculine aggressiveness" (Pavlidis & Fullagar, 2012, p. 3).

According to Pavlidis and Fullagar (2012), the emergence of "new" roller derby has been growing in popularity and has become a space of empowerment and expression for women. The physical demands of the sport require strength, stamina, and contact, which are traits usually associated with masculinity. However, "[w]ith cultural references to rock 'n' wrestling, pin up girls, comic book heroines and dominatrices, roller derby evokes multiple meanings that invite diverse forms of identification and

desiring femineities” (Pavlidis & Fullagar, 2012, p. 3). Thus, roller derby can be a space where participants adopt seemingly contradicting notions of emphasised femininity and violent masculinity.

One study that explored gender and roller derby used participant observation methods to investigate how emphasised femininity occurs in roller derby and how participants navigate gender (Carlson, 2010). By joining a roller derby team, Carlson (2010) concluded that the sport allows participants to disregard traditional gender norms. The adoption of “derby personas,” which are expressed through names and clothing, integrate norms of emphasised femininity. However, the use of the body as a weapon, as well as the appreciation of large bodies, strays from the norms of emphasised femininity. Carlson (2010) notes that this is not simply a case of, “women-turned-Amazonians” (p. 433). Instead, “emphasised femininity becomes scrambled as skaters juxtapose antithetical attributes, namely, emphasised femininity (indicated by short skirts, bras, and panties) and aggression (i.e., weaponry and injuries)” (Carlson, 2010, p. 433). This shows that roller derby is a site where traditional gender norms are challenged and new ways to view femininity emerge.

4. Sport and the Media

While there have been noteworthy strides towards gender equality in the world of sport, research shows that sports are still generally male dominated and reflect notions of masculinity (Jarvie, 2012; Vincent, 2010). These ideas are then reinforced by the manner in which women in sport are represented in the media. The media are very powerful in their ability to shape audiences’ beliefs (Knight & Giuliano, 2003; McKay, 1991; Vincent, 2010), and this is also true for sports media. Therefore, when the media fail to represent women’s sports or portray them in a positive manner, it encourages the

notion of the superiority of men's sports and male athletes. Not only is there less awareness about the existence of women's sports, but there is also a reinforced idea that women in sport should not receive the same attention.

The two main problems regarding women's sport in the media are overall lack of coverage and misrepresentation. The theory of symbolic annihilation (McKay, 1991; Wenner, 2013) addresses the issue of shortage of women's sport in the media. Symbolic annihilation describes the absence of women from media images, and this is especially true regarding sport. The amount of women's sports coverage only surpassed the amount of coverage of dogs and horses in 1992 (Lopiano, 2000). Studies have also proven that women are underrepresented in all forms of sport media, including newspapers, photographs, and television coverage (Sisjord & Kristiansen, 2008).

Sport spectators, both men and women, often claim that men's sports are more exciting and demonstrate higher levels of athletic skill (Lebel & Danylchuk, 2009). However, one must question if this belief is shaped by the male dominance in the sports media. Since the media have a significant influence in shaping audiences' thoughts, it is easy for spectators to assume that women's sports and female athletes are not featured because they do not exist or they are not deserving of attention. The denial of media coverage is also a denial of power for female athletes (Hardin & Whiteside, 2010). It is difficult for female athletes and women's sport organisations to find sponsorship because of their lack of exposure (Cohen, 2001). Therefore, it is challenging for women in sport to earn salaries equivalent to male athletes. Female athletes also lose power because they have fewer options for sponsorship, and thus cannot negotiate as easily.

While women's sports receive less overall media coverage than men's sports, female athletes in "masculine" sports are especially ignored (Cohen, 2001; Hardin & Greer, 2009). As previously mentioned, the fear of the lesbian label and homophobia

exist in the sports world. In order to deflect from the “image problem” of lesbians in sport, the media largely ignores women in male dominated or “masculine” sports, such as ice hockey, boxing, and rugby (Cohen, 2001). The visual removal of women from these sports also contributes to the “symbolic glorification” of male athletes (Wenner, 2010). The media continues to promote sport as naturally masculine through the exclusion of women (Hardin & Whiteside, 2010). Sports are hyper-masculinised through the symbolic annihilation of female athletes because audiences are lead to believe women are not featured due to inability (Felshin, 1974). Therefore, male athletes become heroic and the embodiment of masculinity in the eyes of the audience.

Women’s sport has not only had a lack of media coverage, but that media coverage is often biased in its representation of women in sport. Female athletes and women’s sports are regularly trivialised and portrayed as less skilled than their male counterparts (Bruce, 1998). Since women in sport contradict traditional ideas of gender, it also threatens the male hegemony of sport. Therefore, the biased media representation strengthens the legitimacy of male sports while reinforcing the notion that women’s sport is a novelty. The trivialised representation of women’s sport can be seen in the way in which female stereotypes are reproduced by the sports media.

Media representations of female athletes have historically reproduced notions of sexism (Cooky, Wachs, Messner & Dworkin, 2010). Coverage of women’s sports events often shifts the focus from the results of the event to the appearances of the female athletes (Bruce, 2013). Vincent (2010) describes the contrasting images of “sporting Lolitas” and “Amazons” in women sport. The “sporting Lolita” embodies acceptable feminine traits and receives the most media coverage. “Amazons,” on the other hand, are depicted as unnaturally masculine in both their appearances and physical abilities. This promotes the belief that femininity and athleticism are contrasting traits.

The media's sexualised portrayal of female athletes is also problematic because it implies that women must present themselves in this way in order to succeed in the sports world. The concept of the "feminine apologetic" explains that female athletes must be appealing to men in order for them to be acceptable (Lawler, 2002). They must not only have the athletic capability, but they must also have entertainment and desirability factors. This makes it difficult for women in "masculine" (e.g. American football, hockey, rugby) sports to receive the same media coverage as those in traditionally "feminine" (e.g. figure skating, gymnastics, synchronised swimming) sports. Boxing is a sport that has long been considered "masculine," and investigations of the sport are presented in the following sections.

5. Boxing Literature

Sport has served as both a reflection of and influence on social policies in society, and this is especially true for boxing and boxers. While sociological studies of boxers began in the 1950s (Weinberg & Arond, 1952), research focusing on female boxers and women's boxing did not emerge until the late twentieth century. However, exploring the intersection of boxing and social constructions, such as race, religion, and socio-economic class, can provide insight to better understand the current issues in the sport regarding gender.

Weinberg and Arond's (1952) study revealed boxing's pattern of attracting socially disadvantaged young men and youths, as well as the sport's power dynamic that keeps already socially subjected boxers in subordinate positions. They found the majority of professional boxers were men who grew up in lower socioeconomic families and urban communities, had histories of violent altercations, and were attracted to the respect and money linked to professional boxing. However, managers were often

interested in “the money first and the man second,” and therefore, viewed their boxers as commodities and exploiting boxers was a common practice (Weinberg & Around, 1952, p. 466). This existing power hierarchy within the sport is significant because it reproduces social structures of subordinating groups of people of specific communities. Hare (1971) found that in 1971, more than 70% of U.S. boxers were African-American, and for some of them, boxing, “[allowed] them to escape the derivation of the slums, but for most, it merely reflects and aggravates their basic oppression” (p. 8). This suggests that the exploitation that exists within the sport reflects the exploitation that occurs in society.

Men of socially marginalised communities, however, continued to pursue boxing careers, and the sport is now well known for reflecting the “changes in ethnic composition of members of urban lower strata” (Halbert, 1997, p. 9). According to Sammons (1988, p. 31), “[s]ince prizefighting has been characterised by some as a true test of skill, courage, intelligence, and manhood, boxing champions have traditionally stood as symbols of national and racial superiority.” The concept of social Darwinism also contributed to the idea that success in the ring indicated racial and national superiority (Sugden, 1996). Institutionalised racism, however, pushed more racial and ethnic minorities towards boxing as a means to move up both economic and social ladders (Sugden, 1996). This led to white champion boxers being challenged by boxers of colour and ethnic minorities, and these matches were often framed in a greater social context. Boxers, specifically champions, were symbols of ethnic pride, hope, and representations of the possibility of success for these communities (Cooley, 2010).

While there is significant literature as to the role of boxing in social movements, the literature had until recently mostly failed to address the growing presence of women in the sport. In fairness, the fact that women’s boxing is a young sport compared to

men's boxing is a contributing factor to the lack of material. However, the limited acknowledgment is problematic. Although Sugden (1996) recognises the overarching exclusion of women in his work, he references Oates' (1987) description of boxing as a symbolised form of sexual intercourse as a reason why women would be attracted to the sport. Oates (1987) compares boxing and sex by highlighting the use of the body in both acts; one utilises the body to provide pleasure to others and display skills and expertise. Sugden (1996) calls for more research in the area, but discredits the potential for improving women's sport when he questions whether, "this movement in the direction of sexual equality represents a progressive movement in civilization or merely offers women an opportunity to share in the uncivilized barbarity of men" (Sugden, 1996, p. 194). He implies that the sport is an opportunity to let men act out their masculinities and though women might have the chance to participate, they are entering male territory.

5.1. Women's Boxing

Although sociological aspects of boxing had been addressed and explored in research since the 1950s (Weinberg & Around, 1952), women's boxing was excluded from these studies. It was not until growth of women's sports and the late 1990s that women's boxing became an area of research interest. One of the first research studies to focus specifically on women's boxing was Hargreaves (1997), which offered an overview of the history of the sport "from 'savate' fighting, through competitive boxing, to boxerobics" (p. 33). Detailing the history of women in boxing was significant because similar to other women's sports and female athletes, women were often excluded from boxing narratives.

Despite the lack of acknowledgment of female boxers in historical accounts, Hargreaves (1997) argues that women's boxing was growing in both participation and

popularity with audiences. This growing popularity, however, presented problems for women trying to compete in the sport in a legitimate manner. As boxeroobics was endorsed by female celebrities and attracted crowds of mostly middle-class women, the image of female pugilists became a common illustration in advertising, sports photography, and pornography. Boxing was “used simply as a channel for the commodification of the female body in order to encourage clients to spend money” as attractive women “wearing boxing gloves [became] a popular sporting image in advertisements that use sexual imagery to promote the sales of products – whether or not they [had] anything to do with sport” (Hargreaves, 1997, p. 47). While it is true that the association of women with boxing was growing, it was a highly sexualised idea of female boxers that was promoted and accepted in popular culture. This severed the connection of women from legitimate forms of boxing participation, and many female boxers participated in the “seedy tough girls’ circuit which [provided] sadistic spectacles” due to a lack of properly organised competitions (Hargreaves, 1997, p.46).

Another early study of women’s boxing is Halbert’s (1997) qualitative study of 12 professional female boxers in the United States. Using open-ended interviews, Halbert (1997) found that female boxers often faced sex discrimination and stereotyping in their professional careers, and these women were aware of the stereotypes projected on to them by people both inside and outside of the boxing industry. The study identified six stereotypes associated with female boxers, which are: “(a) extremely overweight or husky; (b) different or strange; (c) manly or butch; (d) lesbian; (e) ugly; and, (f) Foxee boxer” (Halbert, 1997, p. 16). The habit of stereotyping female pugilists lead to the common practice of discrimination in gyms and competitions, and therefore, the subjects of the study felt the need to manage their gender identities in an attempt to avoid stigmatisation.

In order to do this, the professional female boxers described strategies to project an image of traditional femininity, such as “wear feminine uniforms; hide lesbianism and bisexuality; do not associate with stereotyped people; and emphasise feminine characteristics of appearance such as long hair, makeup, and feminine clothing in public appearances outside the ring” (Halbert, 1997, p. 27). This is especially significant because these women believed it was necessary to perform these actions in order to have a successful boxing career. Another significant finding revealed that although men in the boxing industry, such as promoters, managers, and trainers, can hold sexist beliefs and therefore carry out discrimination, female boxers feel a dependency on these men to improve their careers in the boxing industry. These men are in positions of power, as there is a hierarchy in professional boxing (see Figure 2.1). Both Hargreaves (1997) and Halbert’s (1997) explorations into the experiences of female boxers put a spotlight on negativities women experience in the sport. However, other studies demonstrate the importance of fictional accounts of women’s boxing in creating perceptions of female fighters.

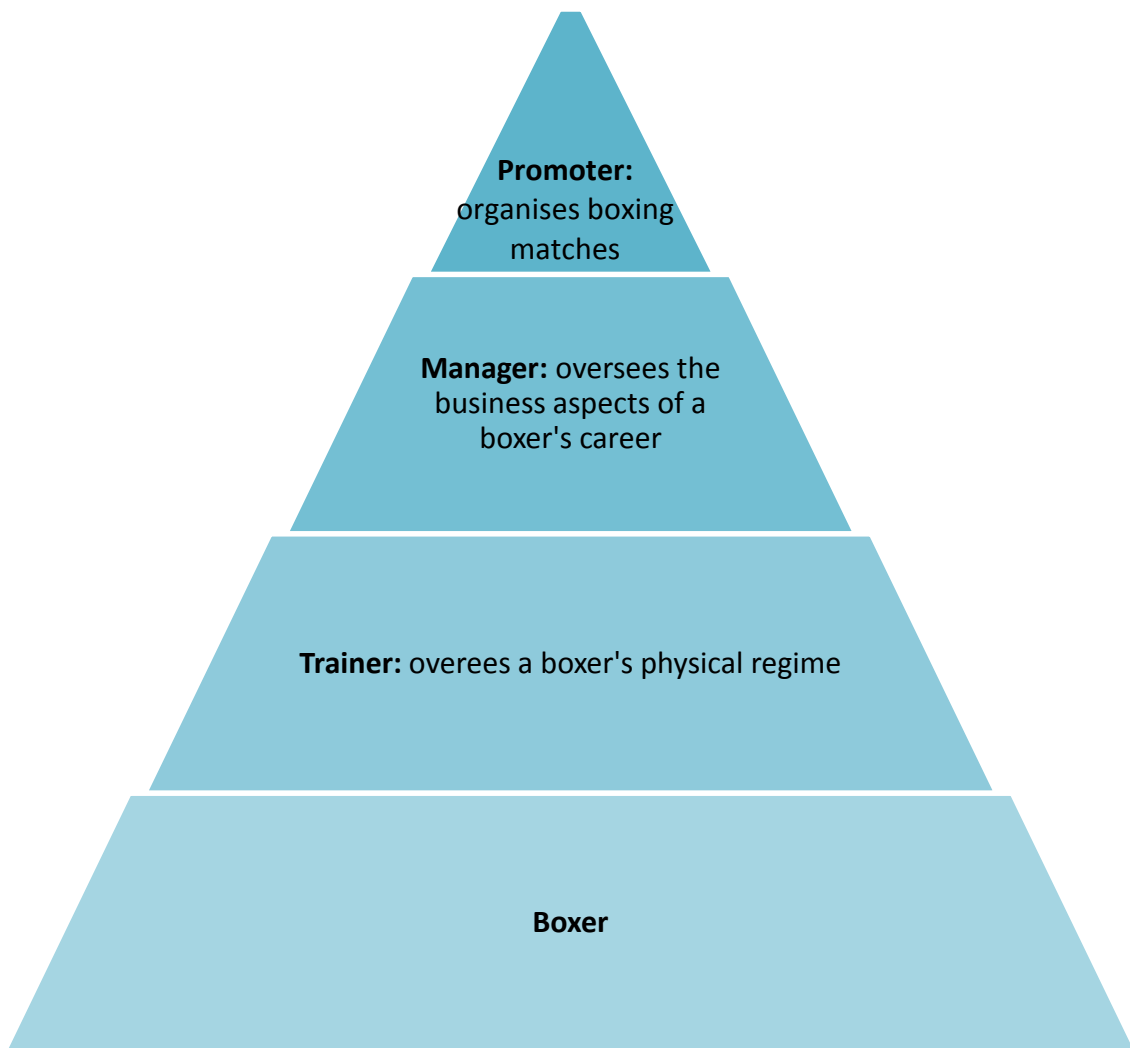


Figure 2.1. Hierarchy in professional boxing (Adapted from Halbert, 1997)

Representations of Female Boxers in Films

Audiences have been exposed to representations of women's boxing and female boxers in various forms of popular culture, and this includes films. One of the most recognisable films portraying women's boxing is Clint Eastwood's 2005 *Million Dollar Baby*. The film received critical acclaim and achieved domestic box office revenues of over 100 million dollars. While this seems like a positive reception to images of women's boxing, research investigating the portrayals of women's boxing in *Million*

Dollar Baby and other films suggests problematic representations of female boxers and notions of gender.

According to Boyle, Millington, and Vertinsky (2006), while *Million Dollar Baby* appears to be about women's boxing and a strong female character, this is only an appearance on the surface. Rather, they argue that, "like boxing, this film is about the male struggle to protect masculinity in a sporting world deeply shaken by the increasing presence of women" (Boyle et al., 2006, p. 99). Firstly, Maggie, the film's female pugilist, rejects many of the heterosexist images of female boxers, such as foxy boxing, that have previously appeared in films. Her demonstration of strength, skill, and courage, which are typically associated with male boxers, disrupts notions of women's boxing as a sexually entertaining sideshow. Furthermore, these traits, as well as her muscular physique, place Maggie within the boundaries of female masculinity. In other words, this character has adopted characteristics and practices typically perceived as masculine. Maggie's female masculinity, "disrupts the gender order of the boxing gym and the male characters' masculine identities that rely on the exclusion of women from boxing" (Boyle et al., 2006, p. 104). Thus, it appears as though the film transgresses gender norms to portray a female boxer that demonstrates the values prized in the sport.

The centrality of the male characters, however, complicates Maggie's depiction of female masculinity. According to Halberstam (1998), the concept of female masculinity can be defined as "masculinity without men" (p. 16). In *Million Dollar Baby*, the female boxer's identity is dependent upon her male coach, who takes on the role of Maggie's surrogate father (Boyle et al., 2006). Maggie continually relies on male characters for support, advice, and boxing instruction. This repositions Maggie within the gender hierarchy of the boxing gym, as her role as a surrogate daughter counteracts her image as independent, headstrong, and disruptive to the masculinity of boxing.

Instead, her character is there to establish her coach's need and ability to be a good father (Boyle et al., 2006).

The use of Maggie's body in *Million Dollar Baby* also serves as a way to position her within heterosexist norms and preserve the masculinity of boxing. Boyle et al. (2006) claim that Maggie's physical transformation and the way they are exposed, "reinscribes a 'heterosexiness' on her body that conforms to contemporary aesthetics of what a 'hot' female body should like (i.e., muscular and toned without an ounce of fat but not 'too' muscular)" (p.104). Her body is only exposed to the audience once she fits the image desired by the male gaze and immediately hidden again when she becomes a quadriplegic. Maggie's physical disability and death, which is caused by an injury obtained in the ring, reinforces notions that the dangers of boxing to women justify their exclusion from the sport. The fact that Maggie becomes physically disabled, "has the ideological effect of not simply containing her transgressions but, more seriously, eliminating her threat to the masculine hegemony over boxing" (Boyle et al., 2006, p. 113). In other words, Maggie is punished with physical disability and death for straying outside gender norms and disrupting the masculine domain of boxing. Although *Million Dollar Baby* is a fictional portrayal of women's boxing, the fact that it presents one of the most recognisable images of a female boxer makes Boyle et al.'s (2006) argument very noteworthy. While real female boxers struggle to find access and legitimacy in the sport, audiences receive messages that women's participation in the sport is actually punishable by death,

Another film that portrays women's boxing is *Girlfight*, which was released in 2000. Although this film did not have the mainstream success of *Million Dollar Baby*, *Girlfight* also received significant critical acclaim (Caudwell, 2008). Similar to Boyle et al.'s (2006) findings, Caudwell (2008) claims there are contrasting messages that exist

within *Girlfight*'s portrayal of Diana, the main character who becomes a boxer. Diana serves as an image of transgression as she disrupts the male exclusivity of boxing and demonstrates strength and control of her sexuality. However, in claiming her sexuality, as she is the one to initiate a sexual encounter with a male boxer, the audience is reassured of her heterosexuality. Depictions of women's sports have often portrayed female athletes as sexual objects. Diana counters this phenomenon because she is an active subject of sexuality. Although this might be a sign of empowerment and acting outside of traditional gender norms, Diana's sexuality is normalised by identifying her as heterosexual (Caudwell, 2008). Thus, similar to Maggie, her transgressions are limited in a way that ease audiences' possible discomforts.

Additionally, the way that Diana is presented as a "lone crusader" in her struggle to box does not expose audiences to the wider issues surrounding boxing and gender dynamics. Caudwell (2008) claims that the film's lack of female characters and Diana's lack of support make her attempts to box an individual endeavour. There is not acknowledgment of a larger collective of women present in the sport or the obstacle that they face. Rather, "[h]er choice to box becomes a privatised version of agency. Her endeavours to box are portrayed as a personal struggle for acceptance. Successes are shown as a result of hard work and determination" (Caudwell, 2008, p. 236). The film ultimately ignores women's struggles to be boxers and portrays challenges to gender dynamics as a strictly individualistic endeavour.

While both Boyle et al. (2006) and Caudwell (2008) argue that these particular representations of female boxers are problematic in some aspects, they both agree that the physicality and brutality of women's boxing is accurately portrayed in the films. This is seen as a positive aspect of the films, as it offers audiences a realistic image of the sport. Both Maggie and Diana are seen to be embodying the traits that are valued in

boxing, such as aggression, strength, and no fear of pain, that ways that depict them as boxers and not female boxers. However, a significant difference between Boyle et al. (2006) and Caudwell's (2008) works what they claim the films are about. Boyle et al. (2006) argue that *Million Dollar Baby* is a film about men, and Caudwell (2008) claims that *Girlfight* is a film celebrating strong women. This difference is noteworthy because *Girlfight* was the project of an all-female production team (Caudwell, 2008). This does not mean that representations of sex, gender, and sexuality will always avoid narratives reflecting male hetero-normativity, but the film serves as an example of, "how those who control production have an impact on the form of representation and create possibilities for women as protagonists and spectators" (Caudwell, 2008, p. 229). This raises an interesting question of whether this sentiment can be applied to the sport of women's boxing. Would all-female production teams create different events and portrayals of women's boxing? In other words, if women occupied the positions of power in the sport, such as promoters, managers, and trainers, would the sport and its participants be presented in a more empowering manner?

5.1.1. Women's Empowerment through Participation in Combat Sports

Despite the existence of gendered stereotypes and hardships facing female boxers, some researchers argue that women can be empowered by participating in combat sports. McCaughy (1997) used her own experiences in martial arts to develop the theory of physical feminism. Feminist theory had largely overlooked the importance of physical strength as a means of empowerment for women. According to McCaughy (1997), self-defence and physicality is a type of counter discourse. She rejects the idea that women participating in aggressive sports adopt a "male model" of sport. Rather, female participants in aggressive sports display strength and challenge the notion of

women as physically weak. By excluding women from physically aggressive sports, the association of violence and masculinity is preserved and women are continually positioned as weaker and susceptible to what McCaughy (1997) calls “rape culture.” This notion of rape culture maintains women as susceptible to rape and physical violence because societal attitudes regarding sex and gender place continually assume they are weaker than men. Physical feminism claims that women are able to challenge this culture through the embodiment of physical strength, such as through involvement in combat sport. Furthermore, she suggests body transformation leads to a change in consciousness that challenges traditional gender ideology.

The importance of transforming feminist consciousness while transforming the physical body is addressed by Castelnovo and Guthrie’s (1998) study in a female only martial arts centre, known as a dojo. Female participants in the dojo developed physical strength and skills, which lead to empowerment of the body and mind. They improved their body image, changed their perceptions of what female bodies are capable of, and maintained healthier relationships with men (Castelnovo & Guthrie, 1998). These benefits are not produced only through empowerment, but also by simultaneously deconstructing the gendered embodiment of women as fragile. By participating in martial arts, Castelnovo and Guthrie (1998) found that combining physical acquisition of skills and feminist consciousness can expand feminist awareness whether or not women began with a feminist mentality.

Another study investigated the empowerment of female martial artists who participated in mixed gender training facilities (Velija, Mierzwinski, & Fortune, 2013). After interviewing 11 women involved in various forms of martial arts, this study found that they, “clearly [challenged] forms of gendered embodiment that position women as weak by becoming physically strong. However, their involvement also [allowed] them

to be complicit in accepting dominant notions about female bodies” (Velija, et al., 2013, p. 538). This means that it is possible for women to occupy numerous forms of embodiment at once. For example, female martial artists can feel strong and empowered while also trying to embody traditional feminine values, such as thinness or less muscular physiques. Velija, et al. (2013) suggest that this is demonstrative of the individual level that empowerment occurs as participants gain physical and mental strength, but do not challenge the gendered beliefs that continue to position female bodies as weak. Thus, further investigation is needed to challenge the dominant ideologies of sport that situate men’s bodies as naturally athletic and aggressive and women’s as vulnerable.

5.1.2. Gendered Experiences in Boxing

Early studies in the area showed sexist attitudes exist within the sport of women’s boxing (Halbert, 1997; Hargreaves, 1997), but the opportunity for empowerment through combat sport suggests women can benefit from participating in boxing (McCaughy, 1997). Thus, exploration in the area continued. Mennesson (2000) investigated how women enter the sport of boxing and what identities they create in the process. Using both participant observation and in-depth interviews, the researcher found that social influences, such as socio-economic class, familial configurations, and cultural capital (i.e. educational level), played a key role in influencing women’s decision to participate in boxing. When compared to male boxers, female boxers represented a more diverse range of cultural capital and also generally held higher social standings than the men. This study also found that women who were introduced to the sport in a coincidental manner, such as being invited to a competition or through a physical education curriculum, later in life were more likely to participate in “soft”

boxing. This style “emphasises technical mastery, grace and balance, penalises the use of powerful blows, and forbids [knockouts]” (Mennesson, 2000, p.23). Women who joined the sport during their adolescence and did so by way of personal initiative, “did not fear incurring blows, enjoyed the use of their fists, and valued efficacy and aggression over aesthetics” (Mennesson, 2000, p. 23), and therefore, usually participated in “hard” boxing, which involves the use of full punches.

The “hard” and “soft” styles of boxing also signified differences in gendered perceptions of female boxers. Women participating in the “soft” style of boxing allowed them to be viewed as “real” women even though they were involved in a traditionally masculine sport. The “hard” female boxers experienced a more difficult time portraying images of conventional feminine identity due to the more aggressive and violent characteristics of the sport (Mennesson, 2000). However, Mennesson (2000) reported that all of the study’s subjects were, “keen to confirm their feminine identities both in and out of the ring. This affirmation involved choosing appropriate attire for the ring (‘something sexy’), wearing mini-skirts after a competition and having long hair” (p. 28, parentheses in original). Thus, female boxers experienced a dual process of reproducing images that promoted traditional femininity while simultaneously distancing from popular ideas of womanhood by participating in a violent sport.

While Mennesson’s (2000) primary aim was to explore how women enter the sport of boxing, there are multiple studies about the experiences of female boxers in the gym. This includes the problem of discrimination in the gym, which sometimes manifests in a difficulty for female boxers to find coaches willing to train them. Indeed, Cove and Young’s (2007) qualitative study used human capital theory to investigate how coaches perceive female boxers and how this affects their willingness to invest time into training female pugilists. Similar to Halbert’s (1997) findings, the results

showed gendered stereotypes influence the experiences and opportunities offered to women boxers. Not only were female boxers “often perceived as smaller, weaker, and less dedicated to the sport of boxing,” but they were also, “accused by coaches and male boxers of being overly emotional, hard to coach, and difficult to work with because they lacked some of the skills and aggression required of the sport” (Cove & Young, 2007, p. 266). While some of the coaches interviewed in their study indicated that these preconceived assumptions were usually not true of female boxers, results found that many coaches favoured training men over women because of the difficulty in overcoming these beliefs.

Furthermore, it was not unusual for coaches to view female boxers as less worthy of their investment because of the idea of the “old boys’ club” that exists within boxing (Cove & Young, 2007). The coaches’ expectations of women’s family obligations also contributed to their limited investment in female boxers. In other words, coaches were concerned they would train a female boxer only to have her withdraw from the sport after becoming pregnant. Despite coaches’ hesitation to invest time and resources into female boxers, Cove and Young (2007) found women in the sport are willing to invest in their boxing careers even though it usually necessitates additional effort both inside and outside of the gym that their male counterparts are not required to produce.

This phenomenon of discrimination in the gym is not isolated to a single study. In an ethnographic study conducted in an Australian boxing gym, Lafferty and McKay (2004) found female boxers will, “only ever attain a grudging and limited amount of... ‘respectability’ in the sport... [and] are no different from other female athletes, who try to emulate the hypermasculine model of sport but always get categorised as ‘second-rate men’” (p. 273-4). The existing gender regime of the boxing industry and the culture of

the gym used in their study dictated a concept of women only able to “fight like a girl” rather than a boxer. Once again, gym participants, both coaches and boxers, were influenced by the common perceptions of gender they were accustomed to outside of the gym. For example, boxing was viewed as a natural activity for men while women were unsuited to box due to biological differences between male and female bodies. This contributes to the unique way in which competitive boxing can both enable, through the use of physical aggression, and limit, by resisting the aspirations of female boxers, how women “do” gender (Lafferty & McKay, 2004). However, Lafferty and McKay (2004) argue that female empowerment through boxing occurs almost exclusively at the individual level. Ultimately, they conclude that they are “reluctant to declare competitive boxing can be a substantive site of resistance for women while it continues to reproduce hegemonic masculinity” (p. 274).

The role of the physical body has also been highlighted in the production of gender regimes in the gym. The sport of boxing relies on the use of the body as a weapon, and therefore, a boxer’s body becomes a form of capital (Wacquant, 1995). The single act of creating the appearance of the ideal boxer, which is “lean, muscular, dark, fierce-looking,” affords symbolic capital and respect in the gym even if boxing skill is not exceptional (Paradis, 2012). This is difficult for female boxers to achieve because the description of the ideal boxing body contrasts the ideal image of the feminine body that is upheld in Western society. Paradis (2004), who utilised ethnographic research methods in an American boxing gym, found that she possessed bodily capital in comparison to other female boxers in the gym because she was “tall, muscular, lean, and attractive” (p. 93). While her bodily capital in the gym signified a boxer, it also signalled womanhood. Therefore, the researcher was viewed first and foremost as a woman rather than a boxer even though she was more skilful than some of

the male gym members. In other words, physical characteristics of the body, such as weight, sex indicators, and attractiveness, play a key role in structuring social spaces, such as the boxing gym.

While the previously discussed studies demonstrate discriminatory practices and beliefs in gyms, there is evidence of gyms welcoming female boxers and attempts to practice gender neutrality within the space. Dortants and Knoppers (2012) used observations and interviews to explore diversity, including ethnicity, educational level, and gender, in the Box Gym Club (BGC) in the Netherlands. Their aim was to investigate diversity and its role in managing processes of inclusion and exclusion in the gym. According to the trainers of the BGC, discrimination was not acceptable and, “gender and ethnic background [were] not relevant” (Dortants & Knoppers, 2012, p. 544). They valued the idea of gender neutrality and expected men and women to train together and take turns leading training sessions. Although the BGC trainers claimed gender was not a factor in the treatment of their boxers, Dortants and Knoppers (2012) found that gendered practices did occur in the gym. They offered the selection of uniforms for the boxers as an example:

Before the boxer competes, the fighter gets a new uniform that the trainer has selected and bought specifically for him or her. For women these outfits are not automatically the usual ‘male’ outfits consisting of big shorts and tank tops but of short culottes with matching tight tank tops... his choice of women’s uniforms always pushes the limits of what boxers are allowed to wear in the ring. He accepts the resulting confrontations [with the Dutch boxing association] because he believes women should be allowed to look feminine and should not enter the ring looking like men (Dortants & Knoppers, 2012, p. 544-5).

The trainer claimed he practiced gender neutrality, but his reasoning for uniform selection is influenced by his beliefs of femininity and masculinity. The study reported that the trainers did address gender differences when discussing the possibility of future boxing success among BGC's members. The trainers stated that they felt it was more obtainable to get a female boxer to the Olympic Games than a male boxer because there is less competition at both the national and international levels for the women. Ultimately, the trainers claimed to be gender neutral, but this practice was situational and gender did influence the treatment of boxers in the gym.

The idea of valuing and implementing gender neutrality in the boxing gym demonstrates progress in the inclusion of women in boxing. The trainers in Dortants and Knoppers' (2012) study mentioned the possibility of reaching the Olympic Games as a significant reason to invest in female boxers. This shows that the inclusion of women's boxing in the Olympic Games did have an effect on trainers' motives to value female boxers in the gym. Woodward (2013) also highlights the importance of women's boxing at the London 2012 Olympic Games and the impact of legacy. The inclusion of women's boxing as an Olympic event served as a legitimisation for the sport and female boxers and showcased athletic performances that contrasted early narratives of women's boxing as a parody of men's boxing. According to Woodward (2013), the Olympic debut of women's boxing offered a new discourse for the sport to be taken seriously and "made it possible to think the unthinkable" (p. 249). It allowed the stories of female boxers to circulate and produced recognisable sportswomen; specifically, the female boxer as a legitimate contender in the sports world.

A change in thinking is a significant achievement for women's boxing because, as previously discussed, the historical exclusion, sexualisation, and trivialisation of female boxers has caused stereotypes (Halbert, 1997) and discrimination (Lafferty &

McKay, 2004; Paradis, 2012) to affect the experiences and opportunities of women in the sport. Thinking of women's boxing as meaningful, valid, and exciting is representative of progress in the sport. However, in Woodward's (2013) argument for the change in discourse, she resorts to a problematic comparison to men's boxing, "[women's boxing] was just as good to watch as a sport which requires speed, honed and refined techniques as any men's amateur boxing" (p. 250, parentheses added). While this comparison seems to be an attempt to highlight the proficient level of skill demonstrated by the female Olympic boxers, it uses men's boxing as the rubric to which women's boxing is measured as valid. This phenomenon has consistently plagued women's sport and is a means of trivialisation. By using men's boxing to describe the way in which women's boxing has been proven as legitimate, she recycles the idea of men's boxing as the epitome of the sport. This demonstrates the need to further investigate the sport of women's boxing.

Woodward's (2013) suggestion that female boxers are viewed in a more positive manner following their Olympic debut prompted this study's aim to explore the ways in which female boxers believe they are perceived, and what affects these perceptions have on the prospects for growth of women's boxing. Additionally, the existing literature has not delved into how perceptions of female boxers affect individuals' respective connections with the sport, and how these connections might impact the overall development of the sport for women. In order to further understand these relationships, this study uses the Psychological Continuum Model (PCM) as a tool to explain how female pugilists identify with boxing.

6. The Psychological Continuum Model

The relationship between sport and sport spectators, fans, consumers, and participants has been a thoroughly researched area in academia (Branvold, Pan, & Gabert, 1997; Fisher & Wakefield, 1998; Madrigal & James, 1999; Mahony, Madrigal, & Howard, 2000). However, a theoretical framework to guide the understanding of a sport consumer's development from introduction to allegiance of a team or sport did not exist until the introduction of the Psychological Continuum Model (PCM) (Funk & James, 2001). The PCM consists of four categories operating on a continuum and, "specifies the general parameters in which a relationship between an individual, sport, or athlete is mediated" (Funk & James, 2001, p.121). Each category - awareness, attraction, attachment, and allegiance - offers a new level of psychological connection an individual might have with a sport or sports team, as shown in Table 2.1. A person's connection to the sport is stronger as he/she progresses along the PCM.

Awareness

Awareness is the initial floor of the PCM and indicates when a person first learns that a specific sport exists. At this stage, the individual does not have a particular favourite, but he/she recognises that different sports exist. Someone in this stage can experience increasing awareness as he/she begins to understand how a sport is played and/or is able to distinguish between different sports (Funk & James, 2001).

Research regarding sport socialisation has provided information to understand how individuals are introduced to sports. Funk and James (2001) concluded that awareness of a sport can occur at any point in life, but childhood is a significant time of introduction to sport. One key reason for this is the substantial role significant others, such as parents and peers, and institutions, such as schools and media, play in drawing

Table 2.1.

The Psychological Continuum Model (Adapted from Funk & James, 2001)

Level of Connection	Psychological Characteristics	Boxing Participant's Process of Connection
4. Allegiance	Intrinsic consistency <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Intrinsic influences most important	"I live for boxing."
3. Attachment	Intrinsic features <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Personal importance and meaning	"I am a boxer."
2. Attraction	Extrinsic/intrinsic features <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dispositional influences	"I like boxing."
1. Awareness	Extrinsic features <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Socialising agents/media	"I know about boxing."

children to specific sports (McPherson, 1976; Sage, 1974). Lewko and Greendorfer (1977) found that parents mould a child's interest in activities, and fathers especially have a noteworthy role in introducing children, mostly male children, to sports. Research shows fathers often introduce children to sports by watching specific sports and teams on television, as well as talking about them (Kolbe & James, 2000). Children aged between five and nine years indicated television was the main factor in their introduction to many sports, especially for girls (James, 2001).

While childhood is a significant period in which individuals are introduced to sports, it is possible for adults to occupy the awareness stage of the PCM, too. This

usually occurs when new sports or teams emerge (Funk & James, 2001). Similar to children, adults become aware of specific sports through the influence of family, friends, and media. However, geographic proximity and the importance a community places on a sport can sway a person's awareness of a sport. This suggests that the traditional role of promotion and method of introduction of a new product has a greater impact in creating awareness in adults than it does in children.

Attraction

The next level of the PCM is attraction. Funk and James (2001) state attraction is, "the result of an individual willingly comparing and evaluating the different sports and teams, and acknowledging that they have a favourite sport or team" (p. 128). This is the outcome of increasing awareness and an individual making the conscious decision that he/she prefers one sport to others.

Individuals in the attraction stage may invest in a sport by watching it on television or attending events. Their motivation, however, is often based on temporary situational or hedonic motives (Funk & James, 2001). For example, a person might seek an escape from his/her daily routine (Trail & James, 2001) or wish to participate in a special promotion or event (Baade & Tiehan, 1990). Additionally, research indicates that service quality, adoption of technology, and venue features are factors in a person reaching the attraction level (Beech, Chadwick, & Tepp, 2000; Hill & Green, 2000).

Attachment

Once an individual progresses past the attraction level of the PCM, he/she reaches attachment. This is achieved when a person has established a steady psychological connection to a sport (Funk & James, 2001). Attachment focuses more on

intrinsic than extrinsic processes and refers to the extent to which physical and psychological factors, such as a player's success, stadium, and community pride, promote internal psychological meaning (Gladden & Funk, 2001). The main distinction between attachment and attraction is the degree to which particular mental associations connected to a sport are intrinsically important.

Research concerning sport consumers and attachment has usually investigated the amount to which an individual's attitude towards a sport is mostly positive or negative and the role of that attitude in creating feelings and actions (Mahony & Howard, 1998; Murrell & Dietz, 1992). Funk and Pastore (2000) found importance, which is the psychological meaning linked to an attitude, has been a strong predictor of attitudinal commitment. This indicates that importance, "represents the condition that produces the temporal difference in an individual's attitude toward his or her relationship with a sport or team" (Funk & James, 2001, p. 132). In terms of sport, it is argued that attitude importance signifies the psychological meaning and value related to responses and behaviours provoked by a sport (Funk, Haugtvedt, & Howard, 2000). Ultimately, importance strengthens the emotional ties between a specific sport and a person's self-interest, values, and social identification, which produces a significant psychological connection between the sport and individual (Boninger, Krosnick, Berent, 1995).

Sport organisations can play an active role in helping individuals reach the attachment stage of the PCM. Funk and James (2001) argue that attachment is achieved through a collective establishment of various physical and psychological factors connecting the sport to other significant attitudes and values. This is produced through a network of associations, which are triggered when an appraisal of the sport is informed by advertisements, conversations, and memories. Sport organisations can encourage

movement to the attachment stage by promoting firsthand experience with the sport, providing information about the sport, organisation, and athletes, and creating an image that is appreciated in the community.

Allegiance

The final level of the PCM is allegiance. The PCM emphasises a person's loyalty to a sport when defining allegiance (Funk & James, 2001). While prior research has focused on behaviours of sport consumers, such as attending games, to measure loyalty, the importance of the attitudinal aspect of an individual's loyalty has emerged as significant (Backman & Crompton, 1991; Gladden & Funk, 2001; Hill & Green, 2000).

Mahony and Howard's (1998) study found that sport consumption was related to, "strong" positive attitudes toward that specific sport. They further suggest that attitude formation and associated behaviours should be taken into account when investigating loyalty. Additionally, Dick and Basu (1994) concluded that loyalty acts as a representation of differentiation within levels of attitude strength. The PCM builds upon these investigations of loyalty and establishes loyalty as, "an overall construct to note efficiently that allegiant fans possess highly formed attitudes... that strengthen the psychological connection" (Funk & James, 2001, p. 135). Funk and James (2001) then identify four characteristics of this strengthening process, which are persistence, resistance to counter-persuasion, influence on cognitive processing, and impact on behaviour.

Persistence refers to the frequency and duration of attitudes regarding a favourite sport. A persistent attitude is constant and unchanged over an extended period of time despite the type of information received (Petty, Haugtvedt, and Smith, 1995). The next

characteristic of the psychological connection strengthening is resistance to change. Research suggests that an individual's resistance to changing his/her attitude signifies the primary factor leading to consumer commitment (Dick & Basu, 1994; Haugtvedt & Petty, 1992). This commitment is also believed to reveal preference stability towards a brand, entity, or issue, as well as resistance to different options.

A bias in cognitive processing is another component of the degree of loyalty to a sport. This refers to the manner in which an individual processes information based on his/her attitude towards a sport (Funk & James, 2001). To elaborate, a loyal consumer accepts positive information about that specific sport and resists or purposely interprets negative information. There is also an increased likelihood that certain information will be recalled and be used to direct decision making. Lastly, influence on behaviour refers to the increased possibility a person will participate in some type of action related to the sport. Funk and Pastore (2000) found that loyalty is highly correlated with behaviour in their study of individuals of a professional baseball team. The duration of loyal behaviours is also a factor when determining allegiance (Funk & James, 2001). For example, an individual who watches his/her favourite sport every weekend is demonstrating an allegiant behaviour.

6.1. Application of the PCM

The PCM has been proven as a valid tool in analysing both participants' and spectators' psychological connections with their chosen sports. Studies have used the PCM to investigate a variety of sports contexts, including specific events (Filo, Funk, & O'Brien, 2009), individual sports (Funk, Beaton, & Pritchard, 2011), and team sports (de Groot & Robinson, 2008). While the literature concerning the PCM and sports

participants is of more interest for this study, the literature regarding spectators offers valuable insight of the PCM, and therefore, will be included in this section.

An individual's progression through the PCM from awareness to allegiance was explored in de Groot and Robinson's (2008) case study of a fan and the Collingwood Australian Football Club. Using an interpretive biographical approach, this study suggests that "people surrounding an individual are the most influential in that person becoming attached to a sports team" (de Groot & Robinson, 2008, p. 135). In particular, family and close friends heavily influence if a person becomes attached to a team and if that team takes on a personal meaning. Thus, desires to belong and be a part of a group are identified as contributing factors in developing attachment. Achieving a feeling of belonging was recognised as the greatest reward a fan can obtain because "the safety and comfort of a group, the feeling you are with like-minded people creates an opportunity for an individual to enhance his self-image" (de Groot & Robinson, 2008, p. 135). The opportunity to identify with a group and maintain a sense of belonging allows an individual to improve positive self-image and is, therefore, additionally beneficial for a person.

The PCM has also been used to investigate the development of team identification in relation to a new sport team, such as A-League soccer club Sydney FC (Lock, Taylor, Funk, & Darcy, 2012). This study provided evidence of how quickly an individual can reach the allegiance stage of the PCM, as participants went from awareness to allegiance over the course of a single season. Lock et al. (2012) found four identification themes that align with the PCM stages. The first two, centrality and personas, are a part of subjects' internal meaning of team identification. Centrality signified identification becoming a part of daily life. Individuals in the attachment and allegiance stages had internalised their team identification and demonstrated such by

planning behaviours around Sydney FC's schedule. Personas referred to the cognitive awareness and knowledge of players and coaches, which steadily increased with progression along the PCM. The next two identification themes, searching and spruiking are external behaviours. Subjects reflected an increase in time and energy spent searching for news regarding the team as they became attached and allegiant to Sydney FC. Lastly, spruiking was promoting the club to others in attempts to positively alter group image, which was a behaviour demonstrated by those in the attachment and allegiance stages. While these studies show how the PCM can be applied to sports fans, their findings are helpful in better understanding connection to a sport object.

Funk, Beaton, and Pritchard's (2011) study of recreational golfers demonstrated the PCM is capable of differentiating distinct stages of connection between participants and a physical leisure activity. Using surveys, the study confirmed a progressive sequence of participation development by identifying attitudinal and behavioural characteristics among golfers. Participants' resistance to change, enduring involvement, future intentions, and consumption of golf related media and product all increased from awareness to attraction to attachment to allegiance (Funk et al., 2011). These characteristics can be used to help identify a participant's placement along the PCM. Additionally, the authors suggest, "[t]he stage-based approach to segmentation provided by the PCM augments traditional demographic approaches with an understanding of the types of benefits segments may desire from their participation (Funk, 2011, p. 283). In other words, rather than segmenting participants into traditional demographics, governments or organisations can address the needs and goals of participants based on what stage of the PCM they occupy. For example, by identifying participants in the attachment stage, organisations can gather information regarding other aspects of

participants' lives to gain a better understanding of how to encourage movement to the allegiance stage.

A study investigating runners' involvement in the 2008 ING Miami Marathon event, which included a marathon, half marathon, and 5K run, also supported the notion of segmenting participants by PCM stages rather than traditional demographics (Beaton, Funk, Ridinger, & Jordan, 2009). Examples of traditional demographics include type of event, such as marathon, half marathon, or five kilometre run (5K) at a single event, gender, age, marital status, educational level, income, and ethnicity. When the researchers used these variables to segment their participants, no significant differences were found (Beaton et al., 2009). Segmenting participants into stages of the PCM, however, showed significant difference in participants' psychological connections to running and the race event they chose to run. The findings showed a large underrepresentation of the attraction and attachment stages in the marathon, while the allegiance stage was overrepresented. In contrast, the two shorter distances had an underrepresentation of the allegiance stage and overrepresentations of the attraction and attachment stages. Therefore, Beaton et al. (2009) suggest participants with stronger connections with the sport increase the frequency and extent of their involvement. Also, by identifying participants based on PCM stages, organisations can provide better experiences by meeting specific needs of the different groups. For example, runners at the attachment stage, who mostly occupied the shorter races, might prioritise social opportunities more than the allegiance stage runners found in the marathon. Event organisers can address these groups by providing pre-race activities for before the 5K and half marathon while giving the marathon runners an efficient registration process and sufficient course support. This demonstrates how the PCM can be used to segment participants and provide deeper understanding of participation.

Another study to use the PCM to investigate participant attachment in another sports context, which was a charity sports event. Filo, Funk, and O'Brien's (2009) study explored the meaning the 2006 LIVESTRONG Challenge, a physically active charity event to benefit the Lance Armstrong Foundation, held in participants' lives. The qualitative study revealed the importance of values in creating meaning of the charity sports event, which is a major factor in distinguishing attraction and attachment, for the participants. In this case, the values of camaraderie, cause, and competency contributed to participants' decision to partake in the event, as well as the event taking on an emotional meaning. The researchers suggest that, "emotional meaning can be defined as intangible feeling toward a sport object embodied in the object's ability to allow an individual to connect with others, while experiencing a sense of solidarity, friendship, and belonging" (Filo et al., 2009, p. 377). As the event takes on an emotional meaning to a participant, the individual's attachment to the event grows, indicating that the values contributing to the meaning have influenced attachment. Ultimately, this research highlights the significant role values play in developing attachment to a charity sports event.

The importance of specific values in developing psychological connection to a physical activity was also identified in Evans' (2013) study of fitness boot camp participants. However, this study differs from those previously discussed because it focuses solely on female participants. Funk and James (2006) suggest that the gender of both the consumer and sport object can influence the attachment process and should be explored in future research. Additionally, they claim, "the formation of Allegiance based on social-structural differences related to gender, culture, or other demographic characteristics is certainly warranted" (Funk & James, 2006, p. 210). Evans (2013) applied the PCM to understand how women become connected to fitness boot camp in

order to improve methods to promote physical activity among the female population. The study identified the importance of friendship and shared experience in participants' attachment to fitness boot camp, which aligns with Filo, Funk, and O'Brien's (2009) identification of the value of camaraderie. Evans (2013) also identified the opportunity for self-expression as a contributing factor in female participants progressing along the PCM. This suggests that while a sense of shared experience was important to the women, they also valued the fitness boot camp as a means of individual expression. These studies demonstrate how the PCM is a reliable tool to better understand participants' psychological connection to a sport. However, they do not incorporate a possible stage for negative feelings, which is addressed in Beaton's (2010) suggestion for an additional stage of ambivalence.

6.2. The PCM and Ambivalence

While the PCM presents stages of increasing psychological connection, Funk and James (2001) highlight that "the vertical continuum is not constrained exclusively to upward movement; nor do people necessarily move from one extreme to the other" (p. 141). In other words, it is possible for a person's connection to a sport to lessen and possibly regress. This backwards movement might be temporary or permanent. Even though regressive movement along the PCM is addressed, the PCM does not incorporate a stage to indicate when individuals might choose to disengage from a sport.

Beaton (2010) suggests disengagement can be accounted for in the PCM by adding an additional stage of ambivalence. He identified a problem of not including a stage that would incorporate individuals who participate in a sport, but do not enjoy it. Participants in this stage would possess indecisive feelings toward the sport or activity. They would lack intrinsic motivation, as well as demonstrate low levels of commitment

to the sport and low levels of behavioural intent. As for external actions, people in the ambivalence stage might speak negatively of the sport to others, reduce their consumption of sport related product and media, and maybe at a high likelihood of ending participation (Beaton, 2010). Movement to the ambivalence stage is not linear, and an individual can reach the stage after occupation of any stage of the PCM. Furthermore, an individual is not confined to the ambivalence stage once there; movement to any of the PCM's four stages is possible.

Although ceasing participation is a possible external action characteristic of the ambivalence stage, it is possible for individuals to continue participation despite other demonstrations of ambivalent feelings toward the sport. A study of competitive, elite female gymnasts identified participants as attracted, entrapped, or vulnerable gymnasts (Weiss & Weiss, 2003). The researchers profiled participants who enjoyed gymnastics and received benefits, such as having fun and learning new skills, at low costs, such as boredom and time constraints, as attracted. Participants who had a low sense of enjoyment and perceived fewer rewards and more costs often considered other physical activities to be more appealing. However, these participants continued in gymnastics due to feelings of obligation. These gymnasts were categorised in the entrapped group. Weiss and Weiss (2003) were surprised by the emergence of a third category, which they labelled vulnerable gymnasts. The participants in this group expressed enjoyment of the sport and receiving benefits, but to a lesser degree than the attracted gymnasts. The researchers argued that, "this group of gymnasts might be experiencing a critical transition period in which they are feeling the push-and-pull of both the positive and negative aspects of competitive gymnastics" (Weiss & Weiss, 2003, p. 244). Thus, it appears that this group is in a possible transition to a stage of ambivalence. The entrapped gymnasts demonstrate characteristics of the ambivalence stage, as the sport

lacks intrinsic meaning. Thus, this group shows that it is possible to continue participation at a high level of competitive sport while harbouring ambivalent or negative feelings. The addition of the ambivalence stage is significant because it allows the PCM to encompass a wider range of possible psychological connections between an individual and a sport.

7. Summary

The literature discussed shows that PCM has been used as a reliable tool to better understand participants' relationships with their chosen sport. However, the effects of social perceptions of athletes on one's connection to a sport have not been explored, exposing a gap in the literature. Since literature has revealed female athletes, especially those participating in traditionally "masculine" sports, are still critiqued by audiences, this raises the question: how are female boxers' connection to the sport affected by internalised social perceptions? In order to answer this research question, the social perceptions of female boxers must be identified, which leads to research question one: what are the social perceptions of female boxers? Once these perceptions are identified, the second research question can be investigated: how are these social perceptions created and generated? And lastly, how do these perceptions influence the connection female boxers have with the sport?

Chapter III

Methods

1. Introduction

Qualitative research consists of a wide range of complex and changing methods and practices and cannot be defined by a single set of principles (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Feminist research also offers a multifaceted approach to exploring and widening the current knowledge base, especially in the area of qualitative research. Feminism has been acknowledged for significant contributions to qualitative research methods since the 1960s, but there is not a single, particular method for feminist research (Punch, 1998). Rather, multiple social factors, such as gender, race, and socio-economic class, influence the research design and direct the methodological strategy to best understand the study's participants.

The purpose of this study is to better understand the ways in which female boxers believe the general public perceives them, how these perceptions are created and reinforced, and the implications of these perceptions for the development of the sport. In this study, semi-structured interviews were conducted in Queensland, Australia with Australian, American, and European female boxers. Participant observation also took place in Australia, America, and Dubai and data were collected as extensive field notes. Additionally, media coverage of the 2012 Olympic Games provided further context of how social perceptions of female boxers are generated. Content analysis was used to extract meanings from interview data, observational data, and media coverage in order to develop an in-depth understanding of the information. This chapter provides a detailed explanation of the methods used in this study and their purposes.

1.1. Ontology

At its most basic and simplistic definition, ontology is a philosophical concept that addresses the existence and reality of things and beings (Punch, 1998). In other

words, ontology is the study of the nature of reality. Ontology questions the accepted assumptions of the world, both physical and immaterial, in an effort to understand the true nature of the object itself (Bakker, 2010). While a positivist ontology stresses that the world is objective and therefore, independent to a viewer's perspective, a postmodernist ontology claims that the world is constantly changing and is subjective to the observer (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005).

Atkinson (2012) discusses these differing perspectives in relation to research in the fields of sport, exercise, and health. Objectivists adopt the belief that the world operates by systems of, "biological, psychological, and social-cultural aspects of life" (Atkinson, 2012, p.149). Thus, researchers are able to know and understand the world through the scientific method of research. Constructivists, on the other hand, believe that reality, and knowledge of that reality, is created through social construction. This allows for multiple understandings of the world because there is no universal reality, only a lived reality subjective to one's position and perspective.

In relation to sport, ontological questions not only investigate the philosophical aspect of the sport, but its role and purpose in society, as well (Tomlinson, 2014). The location of sport in a social context is questioned to be either reflective of society, as it so exists, or able to create and define a new, or elements of a new, society. Huizinga's (1970) analysis of sport concludes that it is an independent aspect of life and a major contributor to the foundation of cultural development. However, his argument of sport as "non-real," due to characteristics of its own time and space boundaries and establishment of social groups exclusive to ordinary life, has been critiqued in the field. Gerber (1974) counters Huizinga that it is impossible in terms of ontology for a "non-real," or fake, entity to exist in life. Thus, she argues that sport, or anything for that matter, cannot be fake while simultaneously existing. While Huizinga and Gerber

present contrasting analyses, Morgan (1976) credits the two as setting a foundation for an ontology of sport. He links the two through the conceptual construction of analysing the nature of sport through the lived experiences of sport.

This study utilises a constructivist perspective that reality is a socially constructed entity and therefore, constantly changing. As previously discussed, the shifting concepts of gender over both time and space encourage the notion of a morphing reality. Also, the rejection of a single, universal reality supports the critical argument of feminist methodologies, which will be further discussed in the next section, that research has been established on a masculine interpretation of the world.

1.2. Epistemology

While ontology investigates the existence of beings and the world, epistemology addresses the nature of knowledge. This includes not only what can be claimed as knowledge, but also exploring the relationship between the identifier and the information (Punch, 1998). Epistemology investigates the origin, nature, adoption, and limits of obtainable knowledge while attempting to distinguish, “true (adequate and accepted) knowledge from false (inadequate) knowledge” (Atkinson, 2012, p. 62).

Atkinson (2012) expands upon what is meant by true knowledge as, “a statement about reality that has been supported by some form of systematically gathered and analysed evidence” (p. 62). This accepted knowledge is often linked to empiricism and produced through sensory experiences. However, there are different variants of empiricisms, most of which are based upon epistemological realism. Direct realism, which often promotes the association between scientific methods and empiricisms, concludes that the world can be understood through the senses. Critical realism suggests that sensory experiences can be deceived; one sees an image of an object, but not the

object itself. A third approach is subjectivism, which theorises that reality, and therefore knowledge, is not exclusive of human perception. This particular view has been central in social research in the areas of sport and exercise (Atkinson, 2012).

According to Bakker (2010), academia has accepted the epistemological differences between modern science and humanistic scholarship. He further claims that academia recognises that scholarship is not explicitly scientific. The difference of scientific and humanistic approaches has raised questions of the acceptance of previous research and established knowledge. Feminist researchers have played a key role in the questioning of assumed knowledge, especially since the second half of the twentieth century. Many of these researchers claim that previous research has failed to recognise perception from a female standpoint (Bakker, 2010). While a common theme of feminist epistemology is to highlight the variety of situations in which women experience and work towards social justice for women, there are many different feminisms and feminist methodologies (Punch, 1998).

While feminist thinking is not only diverse, it is also constantly changing as women's positions, both social and physical, evolve and shift. Although feminist researchers might offer different opinions of feminist thought and research methods, they share the core criticism that science is based on a masculinised perspective of the world (Blaikie, 1993). A scientific perspective of this sort is problematic because it causes women's experiences to be either ignored or altered, and contributes to the upholding of an androcentric academia (Oakley, 1974).

It is important to note that while feminist thinking calls for a necessary change of research methods and perspective, not all feminist researchers claim a feminist epistemology is superior to those already in existence. Pinnick (1994) argues it is a contradiction to state a specific epistemology is supreme if all epistemologies are

contextual and influenced by human experiences. Rather, feminist research can critique, modify, and expand previously accepted knowledge by exploring previously unacknowledged perspectives and dismissed areas of study.

2. Overview of the Research Design

Taking into account the literature regarding the social construction of gender, this study uses a socio-feminist theory of gender. This approach suggests gender is created through the intersection of institutional power, organisational culture, and individual agency (Anderson, 2005). These factors interact and produce social conceptions of gender, and more specifically, masculinity and femininity. This study will investigate whether female boxers are thought to be gendered and sexualised according to the hegemonic institutionalised gender notions of women in sport. Further, the culture developed within different boxing organisations will influence this phenomenon, as well as the individual choices and actions made by female boxers. This study, therefore, needs to engage methods that will examine how gendered social perceptions of female boxers are created and recreated through macro and micro processes.

Previous studies on issues of social justice and sport have served as an inspiration for the design of this project. Female researchers have been able to successfully collect information regarding women in contact sports through active participation (McCaughey, 1997; Lawler, 2002). This study uses the method of participant observation, which Agar (1996) describes as a technique encompassing all observation, as well as formal and informal interviewing, in the field. A key benefit of participant observation is the researcher is surrounded by and present in the action and able to collect the desired data (Bernard, 2009). DeWalt and DeWalt (2011) have

expanded upon these descriptions to include the importance of the data recording and the use of information in participant observation.

This study uses a participant observation method conducted over an 18 month period at a boxing gym in Queensland, Australia. Selection of this site will be discussed later in this chapter. The researcher visited the site approximately five days a week for two-hour periods. The researcher also travelled with participants to other locations as necessary to attend related events. Although the use of multiple sites was considered for this study, a single site for a longer duration of time was selected because of the difficulties that can occur when entering the field. Access can take several approaches and once entry is gained, participants might be wary of the observer (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011). Sugden (1996) and Woodward (2008) have both addressed early hesitation from participants in their attempts to conduct field research within the boxing community.

While participant observation allows researchers to gain a sense of the lived experiences of their participants, interviews can add to this knowledge and provide additional insight. Structured and semi-structured interviews are a preferred interpretivist technique of qualitative researchers in the field of sport (Atkinson, 2012) and have been utilised as a primary source of data collection in studies regarding multiple areas of boxing (Sugden, 1996; Woodward, 2008). Although informal interviews took place within the researcher's participant observation, formal interviews can offer more details about a participant's behaviours and beliefs (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005). This study, therefore, also includes semi-structured, in-depth interviews.

According to Atkinson (2012), interviewing methods stem from philosopher Wilhelm Dilthy and sociologist Max Weber's notion of *verstehen*, which loosely translates to, "meaning or sympathetic understanding." This school of thought maintains that the world needs to be viewed from others' points of view in order to understand

peoples' behaviours. Interviews allow investigators the ability to maximise potential variation in participants' responses (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), thus providing a wider range of points of views. While surveys operate on the belief respondents will provide similar answers, interviews compensate for a large variance of responses (Atkinson, 2012). Liamputtong and Ezzy (2005) point out that focus groups take less time than in-depth interviews, but interviews regarding gender have been noted as potentially challenging, and therefore, benefit from a one-on-one approach (Chabot & Shoveller, 2011). Participants might be unfamiliar with the complexities surrounding the concept of gender. Furthermore, the intimacy regarding gender identity can be difficult for participants to openly discuss. Also, one-on-one interviews allow the participant and researcher to be equal creators of data, and therefore, situated in a position of equals (Punch, 1998). This has been a significant point in the field of gender and feminist studies.

Additionally, media coverage of the 2012 London Olympic Games' boxing events was collected and analysed. Both observations and interviews allow an in-depth exploration into the experiences and understandings of female boxers, but the inclusion of print media sources recognises the role media images have had on women's boxing. Analysis of the print media news coverage of the Olympic boxing events also contribute to a better understanding of the national and global placement of women's boxing, and therefore, supplements the data collected from participant observation and semi-structured interviews. Once the research design was completed, ethical approval was granted by Bond University Ethics Committee (RO1482).

2.1. Validity

Validity in qualitative research is not a fixed concept, but, “rather a contingent construct, inescapably grounded in the processes and intentions of particular research methodologies and projects” (Winter, 2000, p. 1). However, the need for some type of qualifying measure is often recognised. Triangulation, the uses of multiple research methods, is usually a strategy for supporting the validity of research because it helps to control biases and establish valid propositions (Golafshani, 2003; Patton, 2001).

Additionally, a paradigm in qualitative research is constructivism, which claims knowledge is socially constructed and subject to change due to the circumstances (Crotty, 1998). Constructivism values multiple realities; therefore, in order to gather numerous valid and reliable realities, multiple methods of data collection and analysis are necessary and entirely appropriate (Johnson, 1997). Utilising multiple methods of data collection, recordings, and analysis will improve the understanding of the construction of multiple realities.

2.2. Reliability

While reliability is a concept used for testing quantitative research, it is often used in all types of research (Golafshani, 2003). The idea of reliability can be applied to qualitative research by suggesting it as a test to measure the quality of the study. This is important because a proper qualitative study can help to, “understand a situation that would otherwise be enigmatic or confusing” (Eisner, 1991, p. 58). This relates to Stenbacka’s (2001) suggestion that the purpose of the quality concept in qualitative research is to generate understanding rather than simply explain. However, reliability is not a universal concept amongst qualitative researchers (Healy & Perry, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Seale, 1999; Stenbacka, 2001). It has been suggested that the concept of

dependability in qualitative research is reflective of reliability in quantitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Additionally, the concept of credibility is endorsed along with dependability (Clont, 1992; Seale, 1999).

Dependability includes accounting for changing conditions within the study, as well as any alterations to the study design (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). One method to enhance dependability is the use of triangulation. The use of multiple data collection procedures creates overlapping, and therefore, cross-validating data. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) explain credibility in qualitative research as the demonstration that the study was purposefully designed to maximise accuracy. This study improves credibility by using the strategies of prolonged engagement and persistent observation, which involves using sufficient amounts of meetings and interactions so that participants have enough trust and confidence in the researcher to allow engagement (Davis, 1992). The researcher achieved this by choosing to spend an 18 month period as a participant observer in a single boxing gym rather than divide the time into shorter periods at multiple gyms.

2.3. Limitations and Delimitations

As with all research, this study has limitations and delimitations, which the researcher openly acknowledges. One limitation of this study is the researcher's accessibility to possible boxing gyms to use as a primary site. Factors such as travel restrictions and personal safety reduced the number of possible sites to use for participation observation. Eliminating certain locations influenced and limited the population that was included in this study.

A limitation of this study relates to the limited ability to apply its findings to the larger population of female athletes. Although a diverse sample was used for data

collection, this study does not address other social concepts, such as race, nationality, and socio-economic status, which are contributing factors in creating one's gender identity. It is also important to note that these concepts exist within the female population and therefore, contribute to the immense diversity of the female community. This complicates the manner in which the findings of this study can be generalised to the wider female population.

A delimitation is the use of a single boxing gym as the site for participant observation. As Punch (1998) explains, gaining entry to a field site takes time, and the researcher must build trust and relationships with participants. Due to the limited time frame allowed for this study, a single site was chosen over the use of multiple sites. The use of multiple sites and communities would not have allowed the researcher to gain total entry into each space. While this decision limits the diversity of participants, it awarded a more thorough exploration into a single community, and provided ample opportunity to achieve data saturation.

3. Data Collection

As described in the overview of the research design, this study incorporates methods of participant observation, semi-structured in-depth interviews, and media tracking. While each method has distinct procedures, they were selected due to their ability to supplement the data extracted from each. The following sections offer a detailed description of each method.

3.1. Participant Observation

Observation has had a long presence in the social sciences (Punch, 1998). It has also been a popular technique utilised in studies regarding gender and sport (Woodward,

2008). When a study includes several participants who share a common environment, observation is useful because it provides the researcher with knowledge about the shared setting (Adler & Adler, 1994). This allows a greater insight into the influence of the environment on experiences, behaviours, and interpretations. Also, observations can be used for context verification when combined with in-depth interviews. Interviewees are usually not able to provide full explanations of their interpretations and actions and may simply give reports of their experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). By observing participants in a specific environment, the researcher is able to collect impressions of participants' surroundings, such as informal conversations, behaviours, and interactions that the participant might have deemed insignificant. Furthermore, observations are not limited by predetermined categories, and researchers are able to explore concepts and themes as they emerge (Adler & Adler, 1994).

The benefits of observation can be further expanded when the researcher takes on the role of a participant observer. Participant observation differs from direct observation in that the function of the researcher moves from “detached observer of the situation to both participant in and observer of the situation” (Punch, 1998, p. 188). Wolcott (1988) classifies three levels of participation and observation: active participant, privileged observer, and limited observer. For this study, the researcher adopted a role of an active participant for two primary reasons. Firstly, the size of the primary field site was relatively small, which means it would be difficult for the researcher to be present and not directly interact with participants. Secondly, minimising status differences between researchers and participants during interviews has been a key point in feminist research in order to avoid hierarchical relationships, which can affect data collection (Reinharz, 1992). By becoming an active participant, the researcher was able to gain

common knowledge and experiences shared by female boxers and establish a more equal relationship during interviews.

3.1.1. Site Selection

Selecting a primary research site for participant observation was a multi-step process. Since the researcher would be visiting the site multiple times a week, the site had to be within a commutable distance, which limited the location to the Gold Coast, Queensland. The researcher conducted an online search for “Gold Coast boxing gyms” using the search engine Google and found twenty-five results.

From the twenty-five results, general personal trainers and commercial fitness gyms were eliminated as potential research sites. This shortened the results to eleven options. The list was further narrowed down by excluding venues that were not solely boxing gyms, such as facilities that also offered mixed martial arts, kickboxing, Muay Thai, and other disciplines of fight training. By selecting a gym that fixated on boxing as the primary research site, boxing culture could be easily identified and not confused or mixed with the cultural factors of other combat sports. This strategy also applies to the gym participants.

Once the gyms with multiple disciplines were removed, there were four possible sites remaining. All four boxing gyms allowed female participants and were within an accessible distance. The researcher then looked into the safety of each possible site. Sugden (1996) addresses the fact that he entered dangerous situations while he was conducting his research on boxing and notifies others to take caution. Further, DeWalt and DeWalt (2011) describe the vulnerable conditions that accompany women conducting participant observation in the field. They also issue a warning to female researchers to be extra aware of their surroundings. Therefore, the geographical

locations of each possible site were thoroughly researched for safety, and the researcher visited the areas, as well. Since the researcher would often be at the site unaccompanied at night, one option was eliminated for safety reasons.

Of the three sites remaining, only one included a female coach in its advertisement. This gym, therefore, became the researcher's first preference to be the primary research site, pending approval. The researcher visited the facility, Gym X (name changed for confidentiality), and introduced herself to the owner, who is also the head coach. He was given an explanatory statement of the project and its purpose. Once the owner agreed to participate, Gym X was selected as the primary research site for an 18 month period of participant observation.

3.1.2. Description of the Site

Gym X is a boxing gym located on the northern end of the Gold Coast in Queensland. It is situated in an industrial area and shares a lot with a distribution and packing centre, as well as an auto repair shop. The surrounding neighbourhood features middle-class houses, primary and secondary schools, and shopping centres.

The gym features a large exposed area that includes a standard sized boxing ring, punching bags of multiple sizes, weight training equipment, and open floor space. There is also a stationary bicycle, rowing machine, and an assortment of untraditional exercise equipment, such as tires, hammers, sandbags, and bricks. While there are separate bathrooms for men and women, there is only one locker room, which is shared by both men and women.

While members can use the gym on an individual basis during "open hours," Gym X encourages members to participate in their boxing classes. The facility offers five classes: strength and conditioning, youth boxing, novice boxing, competition

boxing, and boxing circuit. The strength and conditioning class is the only one that does not incorporate boxing, however, it is advertised to improve fitness levels for boxing. Youth boxing is tailored for participants between the ages of eight and twelve and serves as an introduction to the sport. The novice boxing class also operates as an introduction to boxing, but for members over the age of twelve. Competition boxing is the only class that requires the head coach's approval to join, and this is because it features a mixture of professional and amateur competitive boxers. Therefore, a mandatory skillset is necessary in order to practice at an advanced level. Although the boxing circuit class incorporates boxing movements and exercises, participants mostly hit punching bags or punching pads held by the coach.

All of the classes were open to male and female members, and the boxing circuit had the highest participation rate among women at Gym X, sometimes outnumbering the men. The strength and conditioning class also had a high female participation rate per class. However, the three boxing training classes were always male dominated, and it was not unusual for a class to consist entirely of men. If there were women in attendance, it was never more than three at one time.

3.1.3. Secondary Sites

Further participant observation took place at multiple boxing events at various locations. These events took place in different types of settings in Queensland, Australia, California, United States, and Dubai, United Arab Emirates. Boxing events included sparring sessions, amateur competitions, corporate fight events, professional competitions, and public weigh-ins.

Sparring sessions are arranged meetings during which boxers simulate in-ring fighting in a controlled manner. This is a form of training that can range from light

contact to a near full-force capacity. Contestants usually agree upon the intended intensity of the match and are generally accompanied by their coaches. The researcher attended multiple sparring sessions as a participant observer during this study. These sessions took place in boxing gyms and mixed combat sports gyms. Amenities at these locations were similar to those at Gym X.

The researcher also attended amateur boxing competitions in various venues in Queensland. These competitions consisted of boxers registered with Boxing Australia and featured athletes who have not been monetarily compensated for their participation. Fighters wear a protective headgear, sixteen-ounce gloves, and mouthpiece, and typically fight in three, two-minute round bouts, although this can vary depending on their level of experience. Competitions generally lasted for a full day, beginning with fighters arriving in the morning to be weighed. After all the weights were recorded, coaches and the officiating assembly sorted boxers into matches based on their level of experience and weight. This was followed by a period of free time, usually three to four hours, to give the fighters the opportunity to hydrate and eat, as many weigh in dehydrated and malnourished. These events typically had twenty to fifty matches. Each event was organised and hosted by a boxing club, and the venues included taverns, community centres, primary schools, and boxing gyms.

Although the researcher did attend an isolated corporate boxing event, these events are usually incorporated into a professional promotion. Corporate boxing events consist of contestants without previous boxing experience who partake in boxing training for six to twelve weeks in order to compete against another inexperienced opponent. These events are frequently used as a way to stimulate interest in the local community for a professional event by getting the participants' supporters to attend. It is also common for promoters to recruit people with high public profiles to participate in

corporate bouts. The isolated corporate event occurred at multi-sport complex, while the ones attached to a professional event took place in taverns, a Queensland Police-Citizen Youth Centre, and a boxing gym.

As previously mentioned, professional boxing competitions took place in various venues. Professional bouts are those in which the boxers are paid for their participation. These matches also differ from the amateurs as the fighters do not wear a protective headgear and use either eight or ten-ounce gloves. Promoters negotiate the length of the rounds, two or three minutes, and the duration of the fight, anywhere from four to twelve rounds.

Professional fighters, and corporate participants if they were featured in the same event, took part of public weigh-ins the day before their matches. These events ensured the fighters met the agreed upon weight criteria and were used to generate media interest in the following day's event. Each fighter is called to the front of the room, or on stage if present, removes his/her clothing sans underwear, and stand upon a scale while their weight is called out to the audience. Some of the weigh-ins included a press conference of media interviews, as well.

3.1.4. Data Documentation

An identified practical issue of observation, and participant observation, is the way in which data are recorded. Possible options for documenting observational data include video and audio-visual equipment, audio equipment, and field notes. These techniques may be combined, and each offers strength and weaknesses, as well as varying levels of obtrusiveness (Foster, 1996). Participants might change their behaviours if they are aware they are being recorded, which ultimately affects the data.

Additionally, if the researcher interrupts interactions or conversations during participant observation in order to document data, the situation can be altered or end prematurely.

This study relies on field notes as the primary method of data documentation for participant observation. The researcher recorded field notes in a notebook at field sites when possible and immediately upon exiting a site. Visual recording equipment was avoided in order to comply with the ethical practices of this study and protect participant confidentiality. Field notes were guided by Spradley's (1980) basic checklist, which includes the headings space, actor, activity, object, act, event, time, goal, and feeling. Using these guidelines, observational data collection followed the funnelling process (Spradley, 1980; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995) of recording broad, general observations upon entry of the site and becoming more focused and structured with notes as the study progressed.

3.1.5. Reflexivity

In the social sciences, the role of the researcher as a narrator is an important aspect of qualitative research (Richardson, 1990). Since the researcher is embedded in the research process, reflexivity has become "recognised as an important research skill because it actively takes into account the effect of the social identity and social presentation of the researcher on whom and what is being investigated" (Poulton, 2012, p. 4). In other words, reflexivity serves to demonstrate the researcher's awareness of the self within the scope of the research.

Elliot (2005) defines reflexivity as "the tendency critically to examine and analytically to reflect upon the nature of research and the role of the researcher in carrying out and writing up empirical work" (p. 153). Thus, it acknowledges the researcher's presence and influence throughout the entire research process. The role of

the researcher has an effect on everything from research interests, accessing the field and gaining entry to a site, building relationships with participants, interpreting data, and presenting the findings. According to Poulton (2012), this is even more prominent when there is “gender incongruence” between the researcher and participants (p. 4).

The researcher’s gender can influence the relationships established in the field and the access to data collection. Gaining entry to gender-specific spaces can be a difficult task and the possibility of being denied access based on gender can be personally challenging and potentially derail a project (Schilt & Williams, 2008). Additionally, researchers must be aware of how they present themselves in the field. In her fieldwork among a male-dominated police force, Ramsay (2009) found that she was aware of her sexual status and its affect on her research in a way that her male colleagues might not experience. The gender of a researcher can also contribute to his or her personal safety in the field. According to Sampson and Thomas (2003), female researchers conducting fieldwork in male-dominated spaces face different types of risks. They define ambient dangers as those “encountered in dangerous research settings” and situational dangers as those “evoked by a researcher’s presence in a specific research setting” (Sampson & Thomas, 2003, p. 116). In other words, while some research sites present risks, the researcher’s gender can actually create dangerous situations in the field.

The works mentioned above demonstrate that the researcher’s gender has been shown to impact one’s access to a site, ability to establish and maintain relationships, and preserve personal safety. This is significant because it can be tempting for a researcher to choose not to highlight her gendered role within the research. According to Poulton (2012), “[she] wanted to be accepted first and foremost as a sociologist; [she] did not feel the need – nor did [she] want – to make an issue of the fact [she] was female,

given it is such a male dominated field” (p. 5). As a female conducting research in the male-dominated field of sport, I can relate to her sentiments. However, “[p]art of the reflexive project of modern sociology is to acknowledge the influence of our gender and sexual identities within the research landscape and, in particular, to account for ways personal agendas map onto and shape scientific ones” (Brackinridge, 1999, p. 400). It is important, therefore, that this thesis addresses my gendered role as a researcher and its affects on the outcome of this research. This section provides my reflections on my experiences as a female researcher working in the male-dominated space of boxing, beginning with my personal background.

3.2. Semi-Structured Interviews

Due to the situational and contextual nature of knowledge, interviews are a tool to gain access to the experiences and accounts of participants, who are vital sources of information. The use of interview methods indicates that the value of people’s knowledge, understandings, interactions, and experiences are socially meaningful (Mason, 2000). Denzin and Lincoln (1994), explain that semi-structured interviews allow for contextual data to emerge from directed questioning while providing the opportunity to gather additional data through the use of open-ended questions. The structure of these interviews relies on pre-determined open-ended questions along with probable probes, as well as unplanned questions and complementary questions (Morse & Richards, 2002). This gives the researcher the flexibility to extract data in a manner that suits the tone, pace, and ambiance of the interview, as various factors can influence the experience. During a semi-structured interview, most of the questions are asked in a consistent manner, but there is the option to digress from the pre-determined questions and investigate responses (Berg, 1995).

The act of interviewing, and maintaining an appropriate flow of conversation, requires skills, which are gathered through the experience and practice of conducting interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Also, the fact that participants might not be familiar with academic language and gender theories made it important that the researcher used a shared language that would allow mutual communication while still gathering the intended data. Kleinman (2007) has highlighted the importance of using language familiar to female interviewees, especially when the subject matter involves sharing gendered experiences.

Pre-determined questions were modelled to provide insight to answer the search questions (see Appendix A). The first research question addresses how female boxers believe they are perceived. Halbert's (1997) study of female boxers exposed social perceptions by asking participants about their experiences in the boxing industry. Therefore, interview questions in this study focused on interviewees' experiences and interactions with others both inside and outside of the boxing community. The following are sample questions:

- How do people usually react when they find out you are a boxer?
- What type of setting are you in when people react in this particular way?
- How were you received when you joined your gym?
- How do you think the general views female boxers?
 - Do you think this view is accurate? Why?

By detailing reactions and interactions, interviewees offer insight into how they believe they are viewed by others.

In order to help the flow of the interviews, the last research question, which explores how perceptions of female boxers are created and promulgated, was addressed next. Since this study adopts a socio-feminist perspective of masculinity, pre-determined questions were designed to touch upon sport and the media as institutions, the culture of boxing, and individual agency. In an effort to avoid misleading interviewees, they were first asked: why do you think people view female boxers this (refer to the last question presented above) way? Once they answered, more directed questions were asked, such as:

- How do you see women's boxing portrayed in the media?
- Who do you interact with the most in your gym?
- How do you respond to peoples' reactions when they discover you box?

Finally, questions were asked to investigate the relationship female boxers have with the sport. These questions were inspired by qualitative studies using the PCM. Participants were asked about the benefits, costs, and meanings, if any, the sport holds for them. Additionally, participants were asked about their behaviours related to the sport, such as the amount of time they dedicated to boxing related activities away from the gym. The following are some sample questions:

- How has boxing affected your life?
- What are your goals in the sport?
- What does it mean to you to be a "boxer"?

The pre-determined questions served as a guide and were supplemented by additional questions that arose during each interview depending on the participant's

responses. Once pre-determined questions were created, the researcher conducted pilot interviews to see if any changes were necessary.

3.2.1. Pilot Interviews

Qualitative interviews generally parallel an extended conversation, and the purpose of the semi-structured interview is to examine how participants construct and give meaning to their experiences. Thus, the focus is usually on the knowledge and understandings of the interviewee, which means the researcher must adapt to match the interviewee by altering questions and probes as needed (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). The researcher should strive to keep a continuous flow of conversation in order to encourage the participant to provide detailed answers.

In order to gain interviewing experience, practice maintaining a steady flow of conversation, and to assess whether questions addressed the research questions, the researcher conducted four pilot interviews. Two were with academic staff members of Bond University as interviewees and two female kick boxers participated in the others. The pilot interviews followed the proposed semi-structured interview process including participant recruitment, ethical procedures, recordings, and pre-determined questions. Once the interviews concluded, the participants were asked for feedback regarding the interview experience, which the researcher incorporated into the data collection process.

3.2.2. Participant Recruitment

Once a field site was selected and the researcher began participant observation, recruitment for formal interview participant began. The researcher constructed a criteria list that possible participants had to meet in order to participate as a formal interviewee.

Formal interview participants had to identify as female, as well as be at least eighteen years of age in order to meet ethics regulations.

Because women participate in a wide range of boxing-like activities and adaptations of the sport that do not meet the conditions to qualify as actual boxing, the researcher set the minimum measure for level of participation as recreational boxing. While participants did not have to compete in boxing, they had to participate in person-to-person contact training, such as sparring, to be a formal interviewee. The contact component is critical because boxing is defined as a sport in which two contestants hit each other while wearing padded gloves (Sugden, 1996). Thus, while similar hitting movements are used in boxing related activities, such as “boxercise” and cardio boxing classes, they do not include the contact needed to qualify as a form of the sport. Women who do not compete, but participate in sparring, therefore, box at a recreational level. With recreational boxing set as the minimum level of participation, competitive female boxers, both amateur and professional, were also eligible formal interview participants. Participants also had to be assessable and available for a one-on-one interview lasting approximately one hour. Research candidates had to be willing to participate in the study on a voluntary basis, as well.

Once participant criteria were set, initial participant recruitment began at the primary research site. The researcher approached qualified candidates and explained the aims of the study, as well as the participation process. After candidates agreed to participate in a formal interview, an interview time and location was determined. Each participant was given an explanatory statement of the study (see Appendix B) and signed a letter of consent (see Appendix C). All participants were given an alias, and all recordings and transcripts were labelled with pseudonyms.

The researcher implemented a snowball method to recruit more possible participants at these initial interviews. Each interview participant was asked if they could nominate possible participants who met the participant criteria. The researcher also recruited formal interview participants by approaching possible candidates at secondary research sites, such as amateur boxing competitions, professional boxing events, and boxing-related social functions. While working at research sites, the researcher was able to determine if the participant met some of the criteria to be an interview participant. If the participant met multiple criteria, the researcher informed her of the study and the possibility of contributing to the project as an interviewee. The researcher provided the participant with her contact information, and when possible, received the participant's contact information. The researcher then contacted the participant by phone or email two to three days after the event to schedule an interview.

3.2.3. Participant Description

Thirty semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted for this study. This sample size was determined by the researcher's access to participants, as well as the time available to complete the data collection. All interviewees identified as female and were over the age of eighteen, with an age range of nineteen to forty-six years. Seven participants boxed at a recreational level, fourteen at an amateur level, and nine at a professional level. Participation within the sport ranged from seven months to thirteen years among the interviewees.

Only two interviewees, one professional and one amateur, stated their occupations as "boxer," and one of them listed "boxer" in addition to other occupations. Nine participants stated their primary occupation as student, while all remaining participants declared a form of full-time employment as their occupations. None of the

participants declared their occupation as “boxer,” including the professional boxers interviewed. All interview participants identified their hometowns in Australia, the United States, or Europe, but all were residing, and therefore boxing at the time of the interview, in either Australia or the United States. This limited participants to those participating in boxing within Western societies. Recordings were securely stored and destroyed once transcribed.

3.3. Media Tracking

As previously discussed in Chapter II, women’s sports and female athletes are affected by the images portrayed, or not portrayed, in the media. This is true for women in sports usually classified as masculine (Jarvie, 2012), and therefore, media samples were included in this study to allow a greater understanding of the social perceptions of female boxers.

3.3.1. Justification of 2012 London Olympic Games Coverage

In order to explore the ways in which the social perceptions of female boxers are created and perpetuated, the researcher collected newspaper coverage of the 2012 London Olympic Games. While this study includes professional, amateur, and recreational female boxers, the media coverage collected was limited to the 2012 London Olympic Games to eliminate multiple variable factors that could have influenced the data collected. First, professional boxing competitions are directly affected by the amount of money involved in the event. The financial factor can sway the popularity of the boxers involved, the amount of promotion and marketing conducted at the event venue and location, entertainment value, event availability to the public, and associated media attention. The Olympic event, however, eliminates the

factor of differing financial influence because it is a single competition, yet still offers a variety of boxing events.

Second, the location and venue of a boxing promotion can contribute to the amount of media attention given to the event and fighters. There are certain venues that hold historical significance in the boxing community, and therefore, generate media and public intrigue because it is believed only a high caliber of boxing can take place there. All of the boxing events, including both men's and women's, at the London Games took place in a single venue, the ExCeL Exhibition Centre. This ensures that the location did not influence the quantity or type of coverage given to the bouts and competitors.

Next, the AIBA determines the uniform that the boxers wear during competition. The uniforms consist of either a red or blue outfit featuring a sleeveless shirt, shorts, and protective headgear. Although a female boxer from the Australian team wore an approved skirt, it was the same material and length as the shorts worn by others. However, the most significant aspect of the uniforms for this study is the fact that the men and women wore the same uniforms. There was minimal difference, aside from the skirt of one female, between the clothing worn by men and women, and this also keeps the amount of exposed body between the sexes consistent. The ring attire worn by professional boxers can vary greatly from fighter to fighter and event to event, which can encourage the amount of attention given to the body.

Lastly, professional boxing matches can vary from three to fifteen rounds, and the length of a bout can increase or decrease the public profile of the fight. The Olympic rules dictate the competition format of the boxing events. Even though men's bouts consist of three three-minute rounds and women's bouts consist of four two-minute rounds, there is only a one minute difference in match length. Also, the scoring system

is consistent between the men and women, while in professional matches, managers can negotiate terms and conditions.

3.3.2. Data Documentation

Coverage of the Olympic debut of women's boxing was monitored by compiling data from four newspapers during the London 2012 Olympic Games. Data were collected by monitoring the coverage of the all events throughout the Olympics so that the coverage of women's boxing could be compared to that of other sports, particularly men's boxing. Tracking was limited to the Olympics because there are fewer variables to take into consideration than professional boxing. Comparing the coverage of men's and women's Olympic boxing, as well as other sports, allowed for the use of the same location, facility, governing body, wages, and media rights. These factors are prominent in professional boxing and influence the media coverage given to a single event or athlete, therefore making it more difficult to adequately compare coverage of events.

Four newspapers were used for this study: *The Courier Mail* (Brisbane, QLD), *The Sydney Morning Herald* (Sydney, NSW), *The Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, CA), and *The New York Times* (New York, NY). Newspapers were selected as the source because they tend to cater to a wider demographic than online sources, which are typically aimed at a more specific audience (ie. WESPN was designed to appeal to a female audience while ESPN targets a largely male audience). Sources from major Australian and American cities were selected to maintain consistency with the whereabouts of the interview participants.

Australian newspapers were collected daily throughout the duration of the 2012 Olympic Games, and newspaper archives were accessed after the completion of the Olympics for the American newspapers. Coverage of individual sports was tracked by

counting the articles dedicated to them, including articles about athletes rather than sports. Coverage per sport was then compared to the number of events and analysed as percentage of received coverage. Articles about boxing or boxers also underwent content analysis for comparison between men's and women's events.

3.4. Data Analysis

Once data were collected and all interviews were transcribed, the process of data analysis began. In this study, this includes the qualitative data collected from participant observation, interviews, and newspaper articles. This was achieved through content analysis, which is a systematic method of classifying and tracking topics, words, or themes in data sets (Tomlinson, 2014). Miles and Huberman (1994) describe an approach to qualitative data analysis, which consists of three components that are interwoven throughout the process. These components are: data reduction, data display, and drawing and verifying conclusions. Qualitative research can result in large volumes of data, and data reduction aims to reduce the amount of data without loss of important information. Data display allows for the organisation and assembly of content. Both data reduction and data display strive to aid in drawing and verifying conclusions, but this component of analysis takes place simultaneously. For this process of qualitative data analysis, Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest coding and memoing are the first steps to begin the content analysis.

Field notes and interviews

In order to organise and manage the collected data, field notes, interview transcriptions, and newspaper articles were coded. Coding is a process in which data is labelled and placed into categories and classifications so that all data related to a

particular theme is identified (Scott & Marshall, 2009). This allows raw data to be sorted into an organised manner and themes to emerge. A memo is “the theorising write-up of ideas about codes and their relationships as they strike the analyst while coding” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.72). According to Punch (1998), memoing is the “more creative-speculative part of the developing analysis” (p. 207) and links coding with developing propositions.

The quantity and unstructured presentation of raw data can be difficult to approach. Coding reduces and organises data into thematic categories. Researchers can develop *a priori* codes before the start of data analysis by conducting thorough background research, which can assist in approaching the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). These predetermined codes are useful because they allow the researcher to break into the data with developed codes. In this study, the literature review identified three key subjects in women’s sport, including trivialisation, conflicting notions of gender, and sexualisation. These three subjects were used as *a priori* codes for the data analysis of field notes and interview transcripts. A fourth category of “other” was also created to identify any themes that emerged from the data that did not pertain to the identified *a priori* codes.

The coding process required the researcher to review the data multiple times. The data were reviewed in a variety of groupings, as well. For example, interviews were reviewed chronologically, by geographic area, and by participants’ boxing statuses. This allowed the researcher to become familiar with the data and view it from a variety of angles. The researcher used a colour coding system to manually organise the data into the categories of trivialisation, conflicting notions of gender, and sexualisation. Once data were sorted by *a priori* codes, each category was then unpacked. For example, data coded as “trivialisation” exposed the concepts of “token boxers” and “real boxing.” This

also required several reviews of the data. The researcher used the same manual colour coding system that was used for the *a priori* coding. This second stage analysis allowed complexities within each *a priori* code to unfold and relationships between concepts to surface. The PCM was also accounted for in this process as codes relating specifically to elements of the PCM (such as ambivalence, allegiance, etc.) were identified in this stage.

Newspaper articles

Media coverage of the Olympic Games has been used in previous studies to investigate gender issues in sport (Billings & Eastman, 2003; Eagleman, 2015). According to Angelini and Billings (2010) in their study of television coverage of the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games, media outlets hold power in their ability to choose language that, “collectively (re)create gender dichotomies based on biological distinctions” (p. 364). This has a direct effect on audiences’ perceptions of athletes of different genders. Framing is a theory used to explore this phenomenon in the media. It is used to analyse the way news stories are packaged and investigates the meanings created by this intentional packaging (Goffman, 1974). Keywords, sources, graphics, and terminologies are used to create frames (Iyengar, 1991). In studies regarding gender and sport, media frames have been identified as containing biases, which can cause audiences to hold stereotypical thoughts about specific groups of people (Billings & Eastman, 2003).

The use of participant observation and interviews identified how female boxers believe the general public perceives them, addressing the first research question: “how do female boxers interpret social perceptions of themselves?” The media coverage of the 2012 Olympic boxing events, however, was used to help identify how these

perceptions are generated. Therefore, content analysis commenced after coding the field notes and interview transcripts, and this allowed the researcher to identify common perceptions of female boxers, which became *a priori* codes for analysis of newspaper data. Once again, an additional code of “other” was included.

Similar to the data analysis of the field notes and interview transcripts, the researcher reviewed the newspaper articles multiple times. The articles were reviewed chronologically, by newspaper, and by topic, such as men’s event, women’s event, or boxing in general. Once again, the researcher used a manual colour coding system to group the raw data into *a priori* codes. Data that did not fit into one of the four codes was set aside for further inductive coding. Content in each *a priori* code was then further broken down so inductive codes surfaced.

3.4.1. Quantitative Analysis

Information collected in the literature revealed that the media gives a lesser amount of coverage to women’s sports. Further, the analysis of the interviews from this study revealed a lack of knowledge regarding the existence and legitimacy of women’s boxing. The researcher, therefore, analysed the quantity of newspaper coverage of boxing events in the 2012 Olympic Games.

Data of newspaper coverage of the London 2012 Olympics was collected from four sources: *The Courier Mail*, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Los Angeles Times*, and *The New York Times*. A tally was kept of articles about the 2012 Olympics that appeared within the duration of the Games. Articles were tracked by sport, as well as the gender event covered. Once an overall count was obtained, the number of events for each sport was factored into the amount of coverage of each sport in order to obtain a more equal comparison. This was achieved by dividing the total number of articles by

the number of events within that sport, creating a ratio displaying the amount of articles per event. The information gathered allowed the coverage of female boxing events to be compared to coverage of male boxing events, as well as other female sports.

4. Summary

This chapter presented the methods used to collect and analyse data in this study. The advantages of using participant observation and semi-structured interviews align particularly well with the feminist perspective of this research. Participants were provided a platform to express themselves to the researcher in a manner that promoted equality rather than a researcher-subject hierarchy. The approaches to achieving this were explained in the site selection, participant observation practices, and interview process. Data were also collected from newspaper coverage of the 2012 London Olympic Games in order to further investigate the generation of common perceptions of female boxers. The results of this data collection are presented and discussed in chapters IV, V, and VI.

Chapter IV

Perceptions of Female Boxers

1. Introduction

Chapter IV addresses the following research question: how do female boxers believe they are perceived? The recent growth in women's boxing suggests the possibility that the sport and opinions of female boxers have changed. Halbert's (1997) identification of six perceptions of female boxers (overweight, strange, manly, lesbian, ugly, and Foxee boxer) took place before a more recent growth in the number of participants and opportunities available. Therefore, investigating the current perceptions of female boxers can provide a better understanding of the current state of the sport.

The data highlight four dominant perceptions of female boxers, two of which are similar to Halbert's (1997) findings: female boxers as unfeminine and sexualised characters. The other two dominant perceptions of female boxers are: invisible and illegitimate athletes. This chapter will address these four perceptions, beginning with the perception of female boxers as invisible.

2. Perceptions of Female Boxers as Invisible

The most common social perception of female boxers to emerge from the data demonstrates an unawareness of the sport of women's boxing. Interview responses and experiences in the field reveal that there is widespread ignorance of female boxers as competitive athletes. However, there is evidence of the awareness of the concept of the female boxer. In other words, there has been exposure to images of female boxers, but not in a context that associates them with the existing sport. For example, an individual might be aware of the idea of the female boxer after seeing the portrayal of one in the fictional film *Million Dollar Baby*, but not be aware that female boxers, or women's boxing, actually exist. Since the concept of female boxers was found to be not

completely foreign, but the awareness of the sport was, this perception was coded as “invisible.”

One of the questions the researcher asked interviewees was, “how do people usually respond when they find out you are a boxer?” A large portion of interviewees, 22 of the 30, gave an answer indicating the typical response they get when revealing they are boxers is a form of surprise. Several interviewees used the words “surprised,” “unexpected,” “didn’t see that coming,” and “caught off guard” to describe the reactions they have received.

Of these 22, 14 stated this reaction is a result of people not knowing that women’s boxing is an organised sport. Tina, an amateur boxer in California, recalled a conversation with a retired National Football League (NFL) player:

I met a guy who used to play for my favourite [NFL] team, and we actually went to the same college. I was wearing a university boxing shirt, and he saw it and asked if I went to school there. I said “yeah.” Then he asked if [the university] had a boxing team, and I go “yeah.” Then he goes, “you on it?” and I say “yeah.” And *then* [he says] “they have girl boxing now? Like y’all in the ring and fight for real?” (Laughter) He was all surprised, too. Just sat back in his chair like “huh?!”

In this instance, the recipient appears to only know of boxing as a men’s sport. Therefore, his perception of female boxers is that of invisible, as he is ignorant of the fact that females actually participate in the sport.

While Tina’s experience demonstrates a more blatant reaction of unawareness, the data also present subtle indications of disbelief regarding the physical female boxer. For example, the researcher experienced an interaction with a male Queensland police

officer after leaving an amateur boxing competition during which she developed large bruises and swelling around her eye, known as a black eye, and contusions on her face, which can be seen in Figure 4.1. During the interaction, the officer appeared hesitant to believe the black eye was the result of a boxing match:

Officer (O)- That's quite a shiner.

Researcher (R)- Yes, sir.

O- How did you get that?

R- I just had a fight. (O raises eyebrows while looking at R) Oh, I mean boxing. I just had a boxing match.

O- Boxing, huh? So you didn't run into a door? There's been lots of reports of people running into doors lately.

R- (Realises O is referring to a response used to explain and disguise visible injuries of domestic violence). No, sir.

O- You sure?

R- I got all my [boxing] gear in the backseat.

O- (Shines flashlight towards backseat and looks in the car. (Nods)

Alright. Thank you.

The officer's repeated question and satisfaction once seeing the researcher's boxing equipment implies that he thought it was unlikely she was injured during a boxing match. This finding relates to Charlesworth and Young's (2006) research, which claims that female athletes experience injury differently to men. They argue injuries are met with uncertainty, complexity, and inconsistency for female athletes, but are usually met with admiration for male athletes. Female boxers utilise strategies, such as hiding injuries with make-up or wearing boxing-related clothing to provide explanation, but the doubt



Figure 4.1. The researcher with a black eye sustained during an amateur boxing match

that a woman may have obtained these injuries from boxing indicates a denial of her existence. One 27 year-old professional boxer in New South Wales, Tanya, also recalled experiences when she had to explain visible boxing injuries. She described her coping strategy to try to distract people from making gendered assumptions:

If I have a black eye or my nose got bashed or something, I always put on my boxing jumper or a shirt when I go out. I know people think I'm

getting abused when they see me with a black eye, and they give you those pity looks. But if I wear something that says “boxing” across it, hopefully they put two and two together.

Similarly, seven interviewees explained that they try to cover facial bruising with make-up or sunglasses. This coping strategy was also detailed by four female boxers during informal interviews, as illustrated by Queensland amateur boxer, Amy:

My husband hates it if I have a black eye when we go out. Well, he hates it all together, but it bothers him the most when we’re in public because people think he did it to me. I think it’s funny, but he gets mad so I’ll just wear heaps of make-up to cover it up. I guess it’s easier than explaining how I got it over and over again. Oh! And I always, like I have to, cover it up for work events. I don’t care if it takes all my concealer, I *cannot* show up to industry events with a black eye.

Tanya and Amy’s accounts demonstrate the extended effort female boxers go to in order to try to explain or hide their visible injuries due to the general lack of awareness of women’s boxing as an organised sport.

Wacquant (1995) explains that common injuries in boxing include swelling and bruising of the face, bruised ribs, chipped teeth, damaged ears, and cuts under and above the eyes. The findings reveal most female boxers have been required to explain these injuries to family members, friends, co-workers, doctors, law enforcement officials, and even strangers. When asked why they thought they had to give an explanation for their injuries, the majority of participants said they believed most people assumed they were physically abused by their romantic partners and were concerned about their well-being.

Some of the interview participants recalled situations of using photographs or videos of them boxing to prove the injuries were not a result of abuse.

However, when asked if they thought male boxers received the same reactions and assumptions regarding their injuries, all of the female boxers said no. Interviewees predicted most people assume the wound is a result of some type of sport, not necessarily boxing, or a physical altercation, but not one of domestic abuse, when they see an injured male boxer. Over the course of participant observation, the researcher asked 12 male boxers, both amateur and professional, at Gym X if they have ever had to explain their injuries to a third party. While all 12 male boxers replied yes, none of them said it was because someone thought they were physically abused. Jason, a 23-year-old amateur boxer, described a scenario he said was common for him, “[m]y mates will see my [black] eye and be like, ‘Oh shit mate! You get thrown out of the club?!’ (Laughter) Yeah, they usually think it’s pretty funny. Don’t think it ever really worries anyone.” This runs counter to the response the female boxers described, which is usually one of curiosity and concern. Jason explains that his friends assume his injury is a result of a fight in a nightclub rather than a domestic dispute, and invariably make light of the situation.

This phenomenon is a result of the notions of masculinity associated not only with boxing, but also with the violence attached to the sport. Crosset (1994) argues boxing exemplifies the approved expectation of pain in sport, and athletes are taught to value victory over personal safety. This coincides with Coakley’s (2001) claim that men often link violence with values of masculinity. Thus, men are able to use visual displays of violence, such as blackeyes, obtained from boxing to gain both athletic and social respect. The notion of femininity, on the other hand, is not heightened or increased in value by violence, but quite the opposite. The social constructions of gendered

expectations have suggested violence is ultimately a male characteristic (Messner, 1990). Even though research has shown female athletes are as likely to expose themselves to physical risks as male athletes (Young & White, 1995), the data show there is hesitation to acknowledge the existence of female boxers and the dangers they face.

Additionally, of the 22 interviewees who said surprise was the common reaction to the revelation they are boxers, eight stated they thought it was due to their physical appearance or personality in addition to a lack of awareness that women participate in competitive boxing. Christina, an amateur boxer in California, talked about an instance in which her appearance was the reason for the surprised reaction:

I remember this so distinctly because it's the first time I've ever been called a girly-girl by someone not being sarcastic. (Laughter) So I went to my optometrist, who I go to every year, and was talking about wearing my contacts in the ring, because sometimes they fall out, and he was seriously blown away that I fight. [He says] he thinks it's cool and all, but he never would have guessed because I'm a "girly-girl."

(Laughter) [He says] "but you have your nails painted and your handbag and that long hair!"

Other respondents described times they were told they were too "pretty," "girly," "nice," or "quiet" to be a boxer. Three of the women used a variation of the phrase "if [she] had a dollar for every time [she] heard [she] was too pretty to be a boxer," to express the high occurrence of surprised reactions.

While stereotyped perceptions of female athletes are common across sport, as described in Chapter II, these findings show that the surprised reactions experienced by female boxers demonstrate a continued lack of acknowledgement about the sport and its athletes. Although gendered perceptions marginalise, trivialise, and sexualise female

athletes (Cole, 2000; Lenskyj, 1990; Messner, Duncan, & Wachs, 1996), they acknowledge that these athletes do in fact exist. The interviewees' examples of blatantly surprised reactions and understated indications of disbelief, such as assumptions about injuries, point to a belief that it is not possible for a woman to be a boxer. This could be due to either a lack of knowledge about the sport, or contradictions to hegemonic concepts of gender.

Although Chapter V will discuss how the social perceptions of female boxers are actually promulgated, it is important to note the intersection of gendered expectations and women's participation in boxing. It is a popular belief that boxing is a "natural" activity for men and "unnatural" for women due to its aggressive and violent characteristics (Lafferty & McKay, 2004). Masculinity has been associated with valued athletic skills, strength, aggression, and violence (Bryson, 1987). This is a contributing factor to the belief that it is implausible for female boxers to exist even when presented with evidence. While surprise was the most recited reaction provided by the interviewees, many responses also highlight the idea of women as "token" boxers, which contributes to a trivialisation of their participation in the sport, and questions their legitimacy as athletes.

3. Illegitimate Athletes

Another theme to emerge from the data regarding the social perceptions of female boxers is the notion that women are not legitimate boxers. While this means that some individuals are aware of the existence of female boxers, they do not value these women in the same regard as male boxers. This is reflected in an apparent belief that women boxers do not participate in "real" boxing and, if they do, they are not as skilful as male boxers. Therefore, their presence is seen as a form of "tokenism," and they are

allowed to participate to fulfil a need or desire to include women. Ultimately, this trivialises women's boxing and its participants.

The data collected from in-depth interviews shows 19 instances of participants recalling times they were questioned about their boxing status when they revealed that they participate in the sport. This is equal to 63.3% of participants. This does not include when participants were asked about their status as a professional or amateur boxer, but rather, when their ability to call themselves boxers or their participation in boxing as a basic activity was called to attention. These instances include participants being questioned about getting hit, hypothetically fighting men, and being told boxing against women is easier than boxing against men. Furthermore, the researcher documented eight occasions when she personally experienced similar interactions.

This section is broken into two subsections: "real" boxing and "token" athletes. The first, "real" boxing, describes the idea that female boxers participate in the sport based on their personal merit, but they participate in a lesser form of the sport. It is believed that it is not as intense, dangerous, and physically demanding as men's boxing. While the female boxer's abilities are not doubted in the context of women's boxing, they are doubted when compared to men's boxing.

The second subsection, "token" athletes, refers to the notion that female boxers have not earned the right to participate in the sport. It is believed that they have not proven their boxing abilities to the degree that is necessary for approval. This differs from the idea that women's boxing is not "real" boxing because it does not place the female boxer in the context of women's boxing. Instead, she is seen to be participating in boxing, which is assumed to be a male specific sport. She has entered the space, but is there for reasons other than possessing boxing qualifications.

3.1. “Real” Boxing

Natalie, a professional boxer located in Queensland, explained a common reaction to revealing her occupation as a boxer:

I think the reaction I hate the most - no, I definitely hate the most – is when people [say] “do you get hit in the face?” Or when they [say], “so you, like, hit people?” Annoys the shit out of me. It’s like, why would I say I’m a boxer if I don’t do that? Do you really think I’m just hitting a bag like a spaz?

Upon further questioning, Natalie explains these questions bother her because she feels there is an automatic assumption that she did not earn the right to say she is a boxer.

When asked why she thinks people ask these questions, she stated:

Well, I guess it’s because they’ve never really seen women box so they don’t know we do it. But I also think it’s a bit of, like they think girls can’t fight or shouldn’t fight so they automatically think I’m just doing boxing fitness stuff. You know, like gym classes with boxing, not real boxing.

Natalie’s perspective exemplifies the pattern of female boxers having their position in the boxing world questioned, which is also illustrated in Sunny’s experiences.

As a professional boxer, Sunny also stated that she is usually questioned when she tells people she is a boxer. She described this occurrence, “[s]ome people think it’s cool and some don’t really approve. Either way, they usually ask if I’ve been punched in the face, which I don’t really get because c’mon now. It’s boxing, dude.” Like Natalie, Sunny is asked if she engages in the one of the primary components of boxing, which is exchanging punches. The researcher took part in similar conversations during data collection. She recorded multiple occasions when she was asked variations of the

question, “do you get hit?” or “do you hit people?” This also included the question, “what happens if you get it?”

These questions regarding getting hit and hitting people are significant because they imply that there is doubt the boxer in question does in fact, box. As Encyclopaedia Britannica (2013) defines boxing as a sport based upon using one’s fists for attacks and defence, it should be recognised that giving and receiving punches will happen when participating in the sport. However, the data reveal this main element of the sport is not always automatically assumed when speaking to female boxers.

To elaborate further, the responses to male boxers revealing their participation in the sport do not present the same questioning as the women. The 12 male boxers, previously mentioned in Chapter IV section 2, did not recall any times they were asked if they have been hit. Rather, they described instances of being asked if they are professional, how many boxing matches they have had, what their win-loss record is, and how long they have participated in the sport. Thus, this implies that it is assumed they have been punched, as well as punch opponents, because it is the key feature that the sport is built upon.

These findings suggest that the phenomenon of asking boxers if they have been hit is exclusive to women. The fact that men are not asked this indicates that there is doubt surrounding whether women participate in boxing, even when they state that they do. Interviewees explained they felt as though their legitimacy was being tested. Halbert (1997) found that women have to prove they belong in the boxing gym, as it is a characteristically male space. In other words, she claims female boxers must earn their place in the gym in a way that men do not. She states:

Gaining respect from male boxers, trainers, and managers often evolves over a long period of time, after a woman has adequately proven herself as a serious

boxer... A woman may prove herself serious by proving tenacity, eagerness to learn and work hard, or boxing ability (Halbert, 1997, p. 21).

The data collected, however, indicate this occurrence is not confined to the gym, but female boxers must prove themselves if they claim to box. This is further evidenced by the difference in questioning. While the male boxers recalled being asked, “how many fights have you had?” the female boxers and researcher described instances of being asked, “have you had any fights?” The question presented to the male boxers implies they have definitely had fights based on the fact they claimed to be a boxer. For the female boxers, on the other hand, there were doubts as to whether they have had any fights, even though they made the same claim.

3.2. “Token” Athletes

Continuing with the idea that female boxers must prove their legitimacy, the data presented multiple instances of women being thought of as “token” athletes. This means they are not thought of as having earned their place on a boxing team or in a gym, but rather, they are there purely because of their gender and a feeling of obligation. Nancy, an American amateur boxer, discussed this notion:

It’s sort of like a political correctness thing. There’s some old school gyms that probably don’t care, but I think most places think it looks bad if they don’t have a girl. If you walk into a gym right now, I bet you there’s a shit ton of guys and one girl. It’s like, “see? We got one.”

This sentiment reflects the idea that women are present in the gym in order to prove the gym does not practice gender discrimination. It also implies the female boxer does not have the same boxing qualifications as the male boxers, which serve as their proof of belonging.

Vanessa, a professional boxer from California, explained the different reactions she has witnessed to women's fights during boxing events. Many of the reactions she discussed trivialised the women competing, she explained:

One time, before a fight, I overheard some guys talking about the card, and they saw there was a girls' fight. They started saying things about how we were probably recruited at a bar or something about it being like a bum fight kind of thing. Nothing they said would make it seem like we actually train to do this.

The researcher observed a similar interaction between two male spectators at an amateur competition in California. When one of the spectators expressed interest in an upcoming women's bout, the other replied, "[d]on't expect much. There's always one or two girl fights and it's a lot of this." He then extended his arms and flailed them wildly to demonstrate a poor boxing performance.

As seen in Nelson's (2010) study of spectators' reactions to women's sports, audience responses at sporting events can reveal cultural views and values. The reactions presented above demonstrate an automatic assumption that the female boxers will provide an inferior performance to the male boxers. Thus, the image of boxing as a "blood sport" holding "hyper-masculine ethos," as argued by Wacquant (1995; p. 496), continues to influence the expectations of spectators. This not only trivialises female boxers by disregarding their investment in the sport, but it also reinforces the trend of using men's sport as the standard against which female athletes are measured.

A male boxer from an American college team expressed his feelings towards the only woman on the team:

I was a little jealous when [a female teammate] joined the team. I had to earn my spot. All of us had to go through tryouts and work our asses off

and impress the coaches and really prove we deserved to be there. I mean, it's not like I think girls can't fight, and now I know [she] can, but when she came on it was basically like, just sign right up.

Even though the male boxer does not provide a reason why he believed his female teammate did not go through the tryout process with him, he assumes that she was not held to the same standards as he and his male teammates. He indicates his conclusion that she was able to “join” the team rather than “make” the team, even though he was unaware whether she had the necessary qualifications to earn her place. While this account also demonstrates a predetermined judgment of female boxers as inferior to male boxers, some participants reported that they had not experienced assumptions of lesser boxing skills. However, these women attributed this to their appearances, and in some cases their homosexuality, and the findings illustrate the strong social perception of female boxers as lacking in the traditional accoutrements of femininity.

4. Unfeminine Women

Female athletes who do not follow socially constructed gender norms and expectations are often considered abnormal, which in sport, may manifest as an effort to control women's gender expressions (Blinde & Taub, 1992). The data collected for this study show that this is certainly true for women boxers. By participating in a male-dominated sport that emphasises physical risk and aggression, female boxers challenge both physical and emotional gender norms by not fitting into Western society's hegemonic concepts of heterosexual femininity.

This section is broken into two subsections: physical bodies and homosexual stereotypes. The first subsection refers to ways in which female boxers are perceived as lacking hegemonic femininity due to their physical appearances. The second subsection,

homosexual stereotypes, presents the notion that female boxers are perceived to be unfeminine because they are assumed to be lesbians. Thus, they defy heterosexual norms of hegemonic femininity.

4.1. Physical Bodies

The physical bodies of female athletes have long been the focus of media and spectators' attention (Cantelon, 2010; Jones & Greer, 2011). Duncan (1990) argues that despite winning three gold medals, U.S. track Olympian Florence Griffith Joyner is primarily remembered for her "long tresses, lavish makeup and racy one-legged running suits" (p. 28). American soccer player Brandi Chastain is often recognised for removing her shirt after scoring a winning goal, and women's volleyball players, both beach and indoor, are often viewed as sexual objects, partly due to official rules requiring revealing uniforms (Cantelon, 2010). The findings, however, indicate a different type of attention is applied to the bodies of female boxers. 17 interviewees discussed criticisms or concerns that their bodies were too "masculine," which was often linked to worries of being "unnatural" or "undesirable."

Professional boxer, Randy, stated she was concerned about the way in which her body is viewed by spectators. She described a particular instance when she was at a photo shoot for one of her sponsors:

I had a [photo] shoot not too long ago, and I was really nervous for it. I was talking to the photographer and [sponsor] when I got there and told them they had to make me look pretty. [Laughter] It was, like, please, please, please make me look like a girl and not overly jacked.

When asked why she was nervous about the photo shoot, Randy replied, "I used to get made fun of for having 'man' arms. [Shrugs] I guess I haven't really let it go and just

want to be seen like a girl.” Vanessa also talked about criticism of her body as too “masculine,” but her critiques came from outside sources, rather than herself:

The promoter for my first fight kept pushing me to lose weight. It wasn’t because I had to make weight or move to a lower weight class, but he didn’t like my body type. [He] said I was too ‘bulky.’ They wanted all the girls to be, like, tall, skinny, lanky model-types. I’m short and have muscle so that wasn’t going to be me, but I still tried to lose the weight.

Both of these examples demonstrate criticism of female bodies for not meeting hegemonic ideals of physical femininity. It is also significant to note that their bodies were not simply deemed unfeminine, but were viewed with strong negative connotations.

The researcher documented multiple instances at a boxing event in Dubai during which a female boxer was heavily criticised for her muscular physique. One of these instances took place while the researcher and the muscular boxer in question were on stage in a “face off,” which is when two boxers assume a boxing position and stand face-to-face. While on the stage, a male spectator yelled, “[g]et off the juice!” In sports, “juice” is a slang word for steroids. The boxer then took the microphone and proceeded to explain her body was a reflection of her hard work, athletic achievements, and discipline, and she was very proud of it. Although several muscular male boxers had taken the stage before the women, none of them were criticised for their physiques, let alone accused of taking steroids. The female body as unfeminine is viewed as highly unfavourable by other women, as well. As seen in figure 4.2, the boxer’s appearance is criticised as too masculine by a commenter named Amy. Her comment connotes

strongly negative sentiments as she implies it would be preferable if the muscular boxer looked more feminine.

The heavy criticism of female boxers' bodies aligns with the previously researched phenomenon of objectifying women in sport. While focusing on the female athlete's body can be a way to exhibit the female apologetic by emphasising heterosexuality, this is not the case presented by the data analysed in this research. Instead, the bodies of women boxers are called masculine and viewed in a highly negative manner. This finding aligns with Krane et al.'s (2004) claim that for female athletes, "muscular bodies [are] the primary hindrance to being perceived as heterosexually feminine... It was an unwanted source of social attention, a constant reminder that they were different from other women" (p.326). Although this is a phenomenon experienced by female athletes in a variety of sports, boxing is especially problematic in this regard for women pugilists. As Wacquant (1995) states, "[t]o say boxing is a body-centred universe is an understatement" (p. 66). This is also reflected in Wacquant's (1995) methods, as his ethnographic approach utilised his body as a primary research tool. Within the sport of boxing, participants turn bodily capital into pugilistic capital (Wacquant, 1995). In other words, boxers are afforded respect through their bodies. However, the bodies that are valued in boxing juxtapose the bodies that are afforded feminine value in other areas of society. The muscular bodies that display evidence of combat are prized within the sport. If female boxers wish to maintain a body that grants them bodily capital in the sport, then they do so at the cost of bodily capital in heterosexual femininity.



Figure 4.2. A screenshot of a picture of two female boxers (one of whom is the researcher) posted on a social media website and the accompanying comments, including a comment regarding a boxer's perceived lack of femininity.

4.2. Homosexual Stereotypes

According to Knight and Giuliano (2003), women in sport have become more accepted in society, but the stigma of the “image problem,” which refers to the assumption that all female athletes are lesbians, continues to confront them. Ultimately, homophobia exists within women’s sport and promotes fears that participating, especially in “masculine” sports, will encourage homosexuality. The findings in this study present evidence of female boxers perceived as unfeminine through the stereotyping of women boxers as lesbians. Of the 30 female boxers interviewed for this study, two openly identified themselves as lesbians and one identified as bisexual. However, 20 interviewees stated they had either been mistaken as homosexual at some point during their boxing careers or they believed that others had thought they were a lesbian. Amateur boxer, Natalie, explained that she is aware of this stereotype:

When they hear you’re a boxer, first they’re surprised. Then they think it’s a butch girl thing so if you’re a girl and you box, then obviously you must be a lesbian. I guess most people have an image of big, bad, tough girls when they think of women’s boxing. And if you think of big, tough ladies, then you’re probably gonna picture a big, tough lesbian.

The stereotyping of female boxers was also demonstrated through the lack of surprised reactions that Mary, a gay professional boxer, received:

When people find out I’m a boxer, they’re not too shocked. Like, they might be surprised in the sense they didn’t necessarily think of boxing just because they don’t know much about it. They probably think of rugby or something like that. But when they find out, they’re *really* surprised. Come on now. I’m an out lesbian and a heavyweight. I look the part. [Laughter]

Mary's statement shows that it is her identity as a lesbian that causes the lack of surprise when she reveals her boxing participation.

This is consistent with findings in previous studies. Young (1997) also found female athletes who participate in physically aggressive sports recognised the common assumption that they were lesbians. Western society has used this label to deter women from fully participating in sport, especially those that have been masculinised or are male dominated (Lenskyj, 1990). The use of homosexual stereotyping is also exclusive to women in the sport of boxing. Male boxers are not automatically presumed to be gay because they are boxers. Their participation actually reinforces their heterosexuality as they are able to display strength, athleticism, and aggression through the sport. The assumption of male boxers as heterosexual was presented in the data. On three occasions in different locations, including Queensland, California, and Dubai, the researcher was assumed to be the girlfriend or wife of a male boxer even though she was at the location to compete as a boxer. This demonstrates the assumption that the male boxer would have a female partner without considering the possibility of a male partner, while also denying the researcher's existence as a boxer.

According to Halbert (1997), female boxers are seen as challenging social expectations of femininity. This is then often interpreted as a rejection of heterosexuality in the assumption that all boxers are masculine, and therefore, not women. Thus, female boxers must be gay. This study found that 15 years after Halbert's (1997) study, the lesbian stereotype is still applied to female boxers. However, this research also found that female boxers were not particularly bothered by this stereotype. While they were aware that many people assumed that they were lesbians, they did not interpret it as an explicitly negative stereotype. The participants acknowledged that it was a presumption

that implied they were unfeminine, but did not think not take it as an offense as they did with having a masculine appearance.

Similar to Halbert's (1997) findings, Harris (2005) found that female soccer players purposefully alter or maintain their appearances in order to project an overemphasised image of heterosexuality. The participants of this study described similar tactics, but explained they were aimed to reflect the "girly" side of their personality rather than their sexual orientation. This does, however, contribute to the perception of female boxers as sexualised characters, which is discussed in the next section.

5. Sexualisation

The data collected for this study reveal findings consistent with the trend of sexualising female athletes. This study found three primary ways in which female boxers are sexualised. These forms of sexualisation are: unwanted sexual attention, gendered perceived motivations for boxing, and sexual imagery. The structure of this section follows these forms of sexualisation, beginning with unwanted sexual attention.

5.1. Unwanted Sexual Attention

While recounting their boxing experiences, several interviewees described instances of receiving unwanted sexual attention in relation to their identity as a boxer both in and out of a boxing-related setting. Furthermore, the researcher observed and experienced this occurrence during data collection, as well. Unwanted sexual attention consists of instances when the recipient was acknowledged in a manner that included sexual connotation, but was not prompted by purposeful action.

Courting female boxers

One common way in which unwanted sexual attention is directed at female boxers is being courted, mainly by men, within boxing environments, such as gyms and competitions. Indeed, 24 interview participants recalled times when they were asked on dates or believed they were talked to in a flirtatious manner, often referred to as being “hit on,” while in a boxing setting. Interviewees of professional, amateur, and recreational status claim they had been “hit on” by fellow boxers, coaches, managers, and spectators. Tina described her experience of a well-known coach asking her to go on dates with him:

There’s this one coach from another gym, who is actually my coach’s best friend, too. He brings his fighters around [my gym] a lot for sparring and he would give me some pointers, which I appreciated. Then one time I was looking for a recommendation for a mechanic and he said he’d get his friend to look after me so I gave him my phone number to pass along. But then he started messaging me all the time to come over or go out for a drink or dinner. I didn’t flat out say ‘no’ because it’s awkward I still see him in the gym a lot, but he told me not to tell my coach so he knew it was sleazy.

Tina’s account of the interaction illustrates the occurrence of female boxers being courted even though the coach was aware of her status as one gym’s competitive boxer.

While the female boxers interviewed stated that this happened at multiple points during their time boxing, three of them stated they thought women were most likely to be approached in a flirtatious manner when they first enter the sport. Crystal, a professional boxer, discussed this idea:

You see it happen any time a new girl comes to the gym. The boys are always interested since it's a sausage-fest in here [laughter]. I think they're, like, sussing her out, trying to see if they can have some fun. A couple guys at the gym tried to get in with me when I first started training, but once you let them know what you're there for, and I started making a name for myself, and, like, people knew who I was, it hasn't really happened as much. They just treat you like the guys instead.

This not only demonstrates the courting of women in the gym by their peers, but also implies that women are viewed sexually upon entering the space and must work to change this perspective over time.

One reason for this trend of courting within the gym, as evidenced by the data, is the gendered perceived motivations for entering the sport. Of the 24 interviewees who recalled times of being "hit on" while at the gym, 11 discussed how others had assumed they took up boxing with the primary intention of meeting men. Furthermore, the researcher recorded three instances when someone presumed her motivation to box was the opportunity to spend time in a male dominated space. Marina, a professional boxer in Victoria, described a conversation she had with her coach after she had been boxing for approximately a year:

We were talking this one time after I was a few fights in. Just stuff about how I've come along [in boxing] and where we thought I could take it. And he said to me, 'Yeah, I know you're in it for the long haul now. Wasn't sure when you first came around. Thought you might be in here to find yourself a boyfriend or at least a root!'

The word "root" is used in this context as slang, meaning to have intercourse. In this example, Marina's coach had presumed her motivation to box was driven by social

intentions, specifically to gain attention from men. It was through her continued participation and involvement in competition that led him to realise these were not her motivations.

These gendered perceived motivations were also projected by people from outside of the boxing community. For example, Shawna, a professional boxer in New Jersey, recounted the time she told her female cousin she wanted to box. She recalled her cousin's reaction, "[s]he said to me, 'are you really that desperate for some ass you're gonna get punched in the face?'" Another participant described hearing the assumption she took up boxing for romantic reasons:

I think it's because a lot of people can't understand why you would want to get punched in the face so they just assume I wanted to come play with the boys. Even my mom [thinks so]. Like, they just can't wrap their brain around [getting hit] so they think I'm not really there to box, but I'm there to get my flirt on. You know, have a perv, maybe score a date, and then be done with it.

These examples illustrate the fact that some people cannot understand why a woman would want to engage in a sport that presents physical danger. Therefore, they assume that these women must have motives that adhere to hegemonic gender expectations.

This supports Felshin's (1974) theory of the female apologetic, which is the trend of female athletes "apologizing" for participating in sport by overemphasising their femininity. It is important to note, however, that this does not only apply to the actions of the female athletes themselves. Female apologetic behaviour is also practiced by society as a means to justify women's' participation in sport, especially those which are considered masculine (Ellison, 2002). As the findings demonstrate, assuming female boxers engage in the sport to pursue romantic relationships justifies their presence by

focusing on their heterosexuality. This allows others to believe that these women are still functioning within hegemonic gender norms. Additionally, these assumptions justify the presence of female boxers because it means the masculine values that exist within the sport are not threatened by women's desires to embody and demonstrate these values. Rather, they are fulfilling an expected norm of femininity.

These results show that despite tremendous growth in women's sport since Felshin's (1974) study, hegemonic notions of gender still heavily influence the way sport is perceived. The passage of Title IX initiated a massive increase in sport opportunities available to women and lead to a steady rise in the number of female sport participants (Chepko & Couturier, 2001). Yet, the trend of "justifying" women's presence in sport continues to reinforce the notion of sport as a male domain. The emphasised portrayal of female athletes as girlfriends, wives, and mothers (Cooky et al, 2013) and as this study found, as seeking male suitors, consistently positions women as "out of place" in sport. Furthermore, the assumption that women participate in boxing in order to meet men upholds the sexual objectification of female boxers, which can lead to problematic situations of sexual harassment.

Sexual harassment

Sexual harassment, both verbal and physical, was brought up several times in the in-depth interviews. Six interviewees, which is equal to one in five, discussed times when they were sexually harassed during their boxing careers and specifically used the term "harassment." This was supplemented by five more participants who described instances that were also coded as sexual harassment. Verbal, written, and physical harassment was identified.

Nonphysical sexual harassment took place in multiple ways, such as verbally in face-to-face conversations and anonymous yelling in a crowd, as well as written in text on social media. Verbal face-to-face harassment was reported as occurring in the gym. One boxer talked about a time when a male boxer approached her to tell her his opinions about her body shape and clothing while she was jumping rope. The researcher witnessed a similar interaction between a female boxer and male trainer at a public weigh-in. While the trainer was documenting the boxer's weight, she mentioned that she had a particularly difficult weight cut. The trainer responded with a comment about her breasts, saying, "[y]ou ladies got it harder with your chest. And you got some chest there, sweetheart." Alice, who competed in corporate boxing events, described comments that were left on her social media page, "I put up an announcement for my first fight and got a few vulgar comments on there. Some of them weren't too bad. Things like 'is it in jelly?' or 'better be in wet T-shirts.'"

Female boxers also recalled cases of physical sexual harassment, which took place both inside and outside of the gym. One American amateur boxer described how she has been physically sexually harassed in the gym:

We had one assistant coach for a while who would kind of latch onto the girls on the team. But one day I was shadow boxing in the mirror, and he came up behind me to [moves fingers to make a quotation mark gesture] help me with my stance. Let's just say he was touching places he shouldn't have been touching. I stayed away from him after that.

Another instance of physical sexual harassment was described by an Australian professional boxer. She explained the harassment took place in a hotel in the hours following a boxing event:

There were a bunch of us, fighters, coaches, friends, all hanging out, just partying, in someone's, not totally sure who's, hotel room. One of the managers was sitting next to me and told me he had some more shirts for me. I just thought, 'sweet. Free stuff.' So I followed him to his hotel room and next thing I know he pushes me against the wall and starts kissing me. I pushed him away and went back to everybody, but I was just like, 'shit. Really, dude?'

The sexual harassment, both physical and non-physical, implies that female boxers are viewed as sexual objects. While there is recognised phenomenon of sexualised portrayals of female athletes, the hypersexualisation of women's boxing is a contributing factor.

According to Halbert (1997), boxers have the least amount of power in boxing's hierarchy. Promoters, managers, and trainers are all positioned higher than the athletes themselves, and therefore, hold more power. This means that female boxers are positioned in subordinate positions to these figures within the sport. As the examples presented in this section illustrate, this makes female boxers especially vulnerable to sexual harassment from the men who hold power over boxers of any gender. McCaughy (1997) argues that women are assumed to be weak and frail, which make them vulnerable to the "rape culture" that exists in Western society. Thus, female boxers possess even less power than male boxers within the boxing hierarchy. This means that those in positions above them hold power in regards to their statuses within the boxing industry and their statuses as males.

5.2. Hypersexualised Images

Despite the previously discussed phenomenon of homosexual stereotyping, women's boxing is often hypersexualised in a heterosexual manner. With some of the earliest forms of women's boxing taking place in bars with topless competitors, the intersection of the female body and violent activities is often seen in a pornographic context (Rotella, 1999). This sexualisation is projected not only by the media and boxing promoters, but also by the athletes themselves.

Nine of the professional boxers interviewed in this study stated they had projected a sexualised image of themselves in order to promote their boxing careers. Vanessa even claimed that her boxing career focused primarily on a sexualised image:

The company I box for looks for pretty girls to get in the ring and fight.

And I'm fine with that because it lets me box for a living. But at our last event, one of our sponsors was a swimwear company so there was a bikini fashion show after, and all the girls who just beat the shit out of each other got in the bikinis and walked down the runway. My promo picture for the fight didn't even have anything to do with boxing.

[Laughter] I'm poolside in a bathing suit!

Vanessa's promotional picture, as seen in figure 4.3, completely ignores any signs of boxing and sells a hypersexualised event. While Vanessa willingly projected a sexualised image of herself, some of the interviewees did not feel the same way.

Christina, a professional boxer in California, discussed her reluctance to participate in portraying herself in a sexualised manner:



Figure 4.3. A hypersexualised promotional image used to advertise a women's boxing event (provided by interviewee)

Some of the other girls get really into and are posting all these pics of themselves on Twitter and all that stuff. In their underwear or all done up and yeah, I mean, it gets them attention. And I'm sure I could get my followers if I did that stuff, but I just don't want to. Yeah, I've done some promotional stuff all glammed up with the gloves on. But this one time my coach said he got me a fight, but it was in a nightclub and they wanted you to get in the ring and dance around and hype up the crowd.

It wasn't about the boxing. He tried to tell me a fight's a fight, but I just couldn't do it.

Christina's reluctance to portray a sexualised image is significant because it indicates that some women feel that they must do so in order to succeed in the sport. The data reflect Hargreaves' (1997) findings that female sexuality is sometimes considered more important than athletic ability in the ring. This also relates to the previously discussed notion of the female apologetic. By emphasising heterosexuality female boxers are viewed as first and foremost sexual entertainment for the male gaze rather than embodying masculine traits. This further trivialises women's boxing, whether the athletes are willing participants or not.

Female athletes recognise the rewards of being perceived as feminine, such as receiving more media attention, gaining endorsements, and even benefitting from calls by officials during competitions (Kolnes, 1995). Studies also show that female athletes who are perceived to be heterosexual and feminine are held in favour of female athletes who are not (Knight & Giuliano, 2003). Because of this, female boxers, such as Vanessa, choose to display an emphasis on their heterosexuality and feminine appearances. As Mills (1994) argues, an individual should be able to act however she chooses as long as any resulting negative consequences are only felt by that one person. Using this argument, female boxers have the right to present a hypersexualised image without criticism. However, as pointed out by Weaving (2014) in her study of the Legends Football League, "[a] false sense of sexual empowerment entangles women LFL players who may believe they are 'doing it for themselves,' but in actuality are playing into stereotypical heterosexual male fantasies" (p. 764). Overtly sexualised portrayals of female athletes do in fact influence the way audiences perceive their athletic skills. When an athlete is depicted in an emphasised sexualised manner, audiences believe they

have less athletic skills than athletes presented in a non-sexualised manner, (Harrison & Secarea, 2010). Thus, even though female boxers are able to benefit their boxing careers by promoting themselves in a heterosexualised manner, they are actually recreating the images that trivialise women's sport. As the findings presented in this section show, female boxers experience negative consequences as a result of sexualisation. They are the targets of unwanted sexual attention and harassment, and the women who choose not to display a sexualised image are often not afforded the same resources and opportunities as those who do.

6. Summary

This chapter presented the perceptions of women's boxing as interpreted by female boxers. Four prevailing social perceptions emerged from the data, which are female boxers as invisible, illegitimate athletes, unfeminine women, and sexualised characters. These perceptions reveal that boxing is still believed to a "natural" activity for men and an "unnatural" one for women (Lafferty & McKay, 2004), as all of these perceptions devalue the skills, capabilities, and efforts of female boxers. These perceptions result in a lack of recognition, trivialisation, and objectification of the women in the sport.

Despite the growth that has occurred in the sport since Halbert's (1997) study of professional female boxers, the perceptions of "manly" women and hypersexualised "foxy" boxers continue to exist. The association of aggression and violence with masculinity (Bryson, 1987) continues to influence audiences to think of all boxers as symbols of "manliness," even if they are women. The perception of female boxers as sexualised characters plays into heterosexual norms and offers a contrasting image to the

female boxer as unfeminine. The perceptions of invisible and illegitimate athletes only accept female boxers to a limited degree. In the case of invisible athletes, the concept of female boxers is acknowledged, but the actual athletes are not. The concept of illegitimate athletes, on the other hand, recognises that women participate in the sport, but they are viewed as lesser athletes to their male peers.

This chapter also discussed some of the experiences female boxers face as a result of these perceptions. Reactions to physical injuries obtained through boxing, especially those on the face, illustrated the fact that there is disbelief that women box. It also revealed how female boxers attempt to compensate for their altered appearances. The sexualisation of female boxers contributes to experiences of harassment and pressure to promote a sexualised image. Ultimately, the ways in which female boxers believe they are perceived influences their experiences within the sport. Chapter V will discuss how these perceptions are created and promulgated.

Chapter V

The Generation of Social Perceptions of Female Boxers

1. Introduction

This chapter adds depth to the social perceptions of female boxers, which were presented in Chapter IV. Chapter V addresses the research question: how are social perceptions of female boxers shaped, generated, and reinforced? Chapter IV identified four prominent social perceptions of female boxers as interpreted by women participating in the sport. These perceptions are: 1) the female boxer as a invisible; 2) the female boxer as an illegitimate athlete; 3) the female boxer as unfeminine; and, 4) the female boxer as hypersexualised.

Using a socio-feminist perspective, the data collected from interviews, participant observation, and newspapers were analysed to uncover how the previously listed social perceptions are formed and continue to circulate. A socio-feminist view maintains that concepts of masculinity are produced through the intersection of institutional parameters, organisational culture, and individual agency (Anderson, 2005; Anderson, 2008a). Therefore, data were collected from multiple sources to allow for investigation at institutional, organisational, and individual levels. The data analysis shows that the interaction of sport and media institutional bodies, gym culture, and individual behaviours produces gendered perceptions of female boxers. This chapter presents each of the four prominent social perceptions of female boxers and discusses how these perceptions are produced and promulgated.

2. Women's Boxing at the 2012 London Olympic Games

This section covers the inclusion and media coverage of women's boxing at the 2012 London Olympic Games. The ways in which the event and coverage of the event contributed to the highlighted perceptions of female boxers will be presented. This section begins with a comparison of men's and women's Olympic boxing events. Next,

discussion of print media coverage of the boxing events at the 2012 London Olympic Games is presented, including analysis of the quantity and content of said coverage.

2.1. Comparison of Men's and Women's Olympic Boxing

One reason for the perception of female boxers as invisible is the actual male dominance of the sport in regards to competitive opportunities. As stated in Chapter I, women's boxing made its Olympic debut at the 2012 London Olympic Games. A comparison of the various aspects of men's and women's boxing events in London is presented in Table 5.1, which presents data compiled from the Olympic website (London 2012, 2012).

Men's boxing outnumbers women's boxing in quantity of events, participants, bouts, length of competition, and active fight time during bouts. This limits audiences' likelihood of witnessing a women's boxing event. The possibility of being exposed to men's boxing is greater because a viewer has a 16-day period to be exposed to a male boxing event, while the same viewer has only a five-day window to watch a female event. Furthermore, a men's boxing event lasts a total of 11 minutes from the opening bell to the final bell (three three-minute rounds with one minute of rest between each round). With a total of 250 male bouts, there were 2,750 minutes of men's boxing at the 2012 London Olympic Games. While female bouts last 11 minutes from start to finish (four two-minute rounds with one minute of rest between each round), there were only 33 bouts. This equates to 363 minutes of women's boxing at the 2012 London Olympic Games. Thus, if a spectator was not aware that women's boxing was an event, he or she would have a much greater possibility of exposure to men's boxing based on the amount of time the sport was viewable.

Table 5.1.**Men's and Women's Boxing Events at the 2012 London Olympic Games**

	Men	Women
Total number of events (as defined by weight classes)	10	3
Total number of participants	250	36
Total number of bouts (including preliminary matches)	250	33
Dates during which competition took place	July 28-August 12, 2012 (bouts took place every day during this period excluding August 9 for a total of 15 days of competition)	August 5-August 9, 2012 (bouts took place every day during this period excluding August 7 for a total of four days of competition)
Competition format	Two rounds of preliminary bouts, one round of quarter final bouts, one round of semi final bouts, one finals bout	One round of preliminary bouts, one round of quarter final bouts, one round of semi final bouts, one finals bout
Bout format	Three rounds of three minutes with a one minute rest interval between rounds	Four rounds of two minutes with a one minute rest interval between rounds
Athlete uniform requirements	Light boots or shoes, socks, singlet, and shorts	Light boots or shoes, socks, singlet, and shorts or the option of a skirt (national federations can require women to wear skirts during competition)

The history of women in boxing, which was detailed in Chapter I, illustrates that women have traditionally been barred from participating (Jennings, 2014). According to Hargreaves (1997), boxing was still considered an exclusively male space despite growing popularity among women. Even the presence of women was seen as detrimental to male boxers who had to sacrifice female companionship in the pursuit of victory (Wacquant, 1995). The limited inclusion of women into Olympic boxing events contributes to the preservation of the sport as a male-dominated domain. Women are allowed to participate, but only to a lesser degree than men. Thus, the presence of female boxers is acknowledged and allowed, but not embraced on an equal level. By continuing to spotlight the male participants, the event can lead audiences to miss the fact that women do indeed participate.

Furthermore, the belief that women are biologically inferior to men in athletic capability (Couturier & Chepko, 2001) is reinforced by the women's shorter rounds. The idea that female boxers are not "real" boxers is upheld, as it implies they are not capable of competing in three-minute rounds like the men. Thus, the perception of female boxers as illegitimate athletes and "token" athletes is perpetuated.

2.2. Quantity of Boxing Coverage

The news media are a critical factor in forming audience awareness and interest for sports (Cooky et al., 2013). Although there are various media platforms, newspapers are one of the most widespread and accessible media forms, and their sport sections are often one of the most commonly read sections (Coakley, 2009). For these reasons, newspaper coverage of the London 2012 Olympics was collected and analysed to derive an indication of how it contributes to the creation and generation of social perceptions

of female boxers. In order to account for the growing presence of online sources, both print and online newspapers were used.

As previous studies have indicated, women's sports receive less total coverage than men's sports (Kian, Vincent, & Modello, 2008; Lumpkin, 2009). The total number of articles covering men's and women's Olympic boxing was collected from four newspapers during the duration of the 2012 London Olympic Games. At a minimum, this would demonstrate if women's sport, in this case boxing, did in fact receive less total coverage than its male counterpart (see Table 5.2).

Table 5.2.

Number of Olympic Articles Per Newspaper

Newspaper	Total Olympics coverage (articles)	Total coverage of men's boxing (articles)	Total coverage of women's boxing (articles)
<i>The Courier Mail</i>	163	1	0
<i>The Sydney Morning Herald</i>	107	3	2
<i>Los Angeles Times</i>	192	11	5
<i>The New York Times</i>	165	2	4
TOTAL	627	17	11

Although the initial data show that men's boxing had more articles than women's boxing, the men had 10 events compared to the women's three events. In

order to address this difference, a ratio close to 3.3 to 1 would illustrate a relatively equal distribution of articles covering men and women. As the data displayed in Table 5.2 show, women's boxing received a higher ratio of articles per event. Women's boxing had 3.7 articles per event, while men's boxing received 1.7 articles per event.

These data are surprising considering Adams and Tuggle (2004) and Cooky, et al. (2013) had both found that there were decreases in the amount of women's sports coverage over the courses of their respective longitudinal studies. Women's sports coverage reached a peak in 1999, steadily declined for approximately 10 years, and remains exceptionally low (Cooky et al., 2015). Since women's sport is already covered less than men's, a further decrease in coverage would be expected to result in a greater ratio of articles per event for the men's boxing. Nevertheless, the higher ratio for women's boxing indicates that more media attention was given to the women's events.

Indeed, the amount of coverage women's boxing received in relation to other women's sports could play a role in upholding this perception. Firstly, while men's boxing had the third highest total of men's events for all sports, only beaten by athletics and swimming with 24 and 17 events, women's boxing only had the fifteenth highest. The top five for women's events were athletics with 23, swimming with 17, judo and weightlifting tied with seven, and gymnastics, rowing, and shooting tied with six events each (London 2012, 2012).

The 2012 London Olympic Games featured 37 sports with a total of 162 men's events and 132 women's events. Of the media data collected, men's sports had 48.17% of all total coverage, and women's sports had 43.54% of the total coverage (the remainder consisted of coverage of mixed events). Of the 627 articles covering the Olympics, 273 articles were devoted to the 132 women's events. Using these articles, the top six sports with the highest percentage of total coverage within the women's

overall coverage were calculated. As seen in Figure 5.1, the six sports with the most coverage were: 1) athletics; 2) swimming; 3) football (soccer;) 4) gymnastics; 5) basketball; 6) water polo; and boxing.

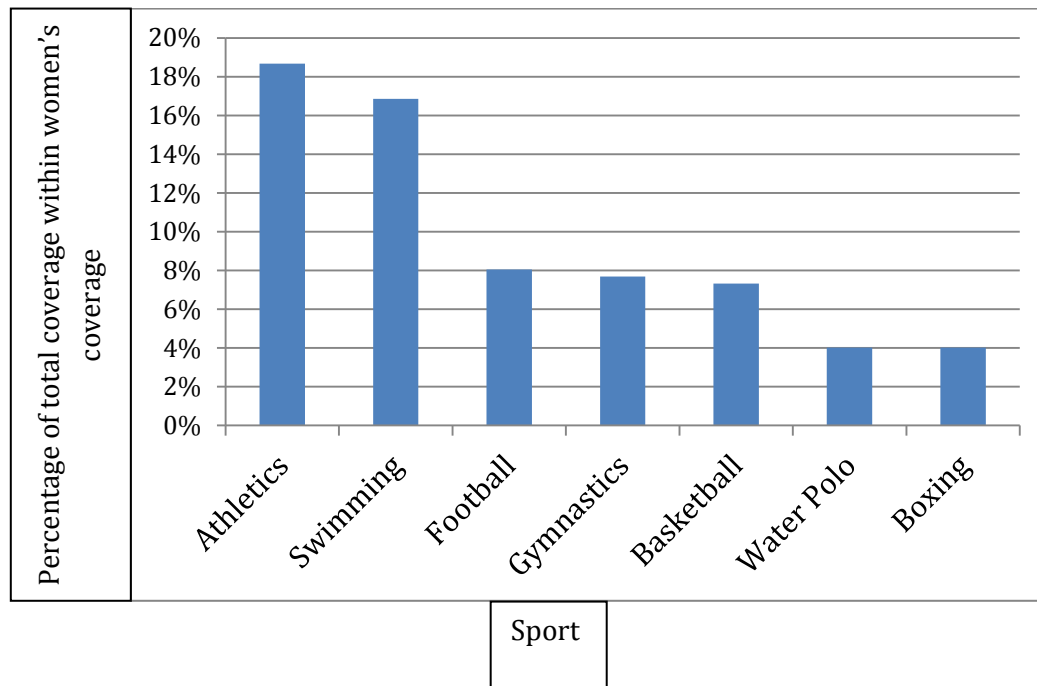


Figure 5.1. Breakdown of individual Olympic sports coverage (women's events only). Only the six most covered sports are depicted (water polo and boxing tied).

The fact that judo and weightlifting had the third highest number of women's events, but were not represented in the top six with the most coverage suggests gender stereotyping of sports may still occur. As argued by Lindner (2012), "female athletes are more likely to receive coverage when they compete in female-appropriate sports" (p. 465). Judo and weightlifting both possess features that have been used to classify them as masculine. According to Koivula (2001), the intention to physically overpower an opponent by contact and face-to-face competition, as demonstrated in judo, and direct application of physical force to a heavy object, as seen in weightlifting, characterise them as masculine sports. Football (soccer) and basketball, on the other hand, are often

viewed as gender neutral even though they may involve physical contact (Koivula, 2001). The establishment and recent growth of professional football and basketball organisations for women has shifted audiences' interpretations of these sports as ultimately masculine. Furthermore, gymnastics features an emphasis on gracefulness and beauty, which typically classifies it as feminine (Koivula, 2001).

The focus of media coverage on gender neutral and “feminine” sports contributes to the social perception of female boxers as invisible. The five women's sports with the most attention - athletics, swimming, football, gymnastics, and basketball - take up over 52% of all coverage given to women. That means less than 48% of coverage is given to the remaining 32 sports. By emphasising attention on sports that are generally considered gender neutral or feminine, the media may be perpetuating the idea that women in masculine sports do not exist. This contributes to the lack of awareness that female athletes compete in sports that have historically been unavailable to them. This then reinforces the perception that the sport and its athletes are non-existent.

2.3. Representations of Women's Boxing in 2012 London Olympic Games Media Coverage

This section presents the ways in which media coverage of the boxing events at the 2012 London Olympic Games contributed to the formation and reinforcement of perceptions of female boxers. Framing is, “the process by which journalists make sense of events by selecting and organising facts and then embedding them in a storyline” (Kian & Hardin, 2009 p. 188). The manner in which women's sports are covered, or not covered, by the media influences audience perceptions of these events and female athletes (Eagleman, 2015; Hardin & Greer, 2009). The role of the media in shaping

audiences' perceptions of female boxers is discussed in this section, beginning with the perception of female boxers as "token" athletes.

2.3.1. "Token" Boxers and the 2012 London Olympic Games

Woodward (2013) argues that the inclusion of women's boxing in the 2012 London Olympic Games made the sport legitimate and created a possible legacy by shifting ways of thinking about the sport. This is a valid claim, as the inclusion of women's boxing demonstrates institutional change by accepting women into a privileged space in which they had previously been denied. However, the immense desire to leave a legacy can lead audiences to believe that women's boxing was included in the 2012 London Olympic Games for reasons other than the opportunity earned by elite athletes.

Objectives for the 2012 London Olympic Games legacy included showcasing cultural diversity, as well "to inspire" (Woodward, 2013). The 2012 London Olympic Games were actually described as the "Legacy Games" due to the frequency in which legacy was cited as one of the most important outcomes of the Games. One opportunity to achieve this goal was to capitalise on the timing, which marked the fortieth anniversary of the passage of Title IV, and promote female competitors and women's sport. Despite the potential shift in discourse by including women's boxing, newspaper coverage of the sport actually suggests the possibility of inclusion as "token" athletes.

Firstly, the manner in which the decision to incorporate women's boxing into the Olympics was reported implies that it was only included due to the need for an additional female sport. The *Los Angeles Times* provides one example of this, "[t]he backstory is that women's boxing entered the Games through the back door. The International Olympic Committee had dropped softball for reasons still unclear. That

caught it short of its gender-ratio goals. Voila! Women's boxing" (Dwyre, 2012, August 7, p. V.6). This depiction portrays the inclusion of women's boxing as a simple solution to meet a quota. It ignores the lobbying by female boxers and their supporters to get the sport into the Olympics, which was ongoing for over a decade, as well as the fact that the number of participants was increasing each year (Smith, 2014). Indeed, 36% of the articles about women's boxing collected for this study describe the inclusion of women's boxing in relation to the removal of softball and the need for a replacement in order to promote gender equality.

Secondly, this perception of tokenism is further suggested by the coverage of the tournament's format. As previously mentioned, women's boxing at the 2012 Olympics consisted of three weight divisions with 12 competitors in each, while the men had 10 weight divisions with 25 boxers in each. Due to the small competition pool, as well as boxing's dual bronze medals, 12 of the 36 women would win medals. The three newspapers that included coverage of the women's boxing events featured this information, but did so in a sceptical manner, as seen in *The New York Times*:

Some of the world's best boxers could not expand or contract into those weights and are unrepresented here. With only a dozen fighters in each division – and some women drawing a bye – a single win can guarantee a medal. Both semifinal losers receive bronze medals (Bearak, 2012, August 6, p. D.3).

This depiction of the tournament format is problematic because it actually trivialises the accomplishments of the female Olympic boxers, which aligns with findings in previous studies. As Fink and Kensicki (2002) argue, ambivalence in sports coverage, "can combine positive portrayals of female athletes with subtle messages that tend to trivialise female athletes' sports performances" (p. 334). By stating that some of the best boxers in the world were missing from the event, the depiction implies that those who

are competing are not facing the most elite athletes in the sport. This can be especially problematic if audiences are not familiar with the sport and the difficulties in changing weight classes.

Continuing with this argument, the author insinuates that obtaining a medal is not difficult because of the small competition pool. The emphasis on the competitors with a bye needing only one win to earn a medal downplays the accomplishment of winning the qualifying bout. Audiences are influenced to believe these women have been given a “shortcut to the medal stand” (Bearak, 2012, August 7, p. B.12). Additionally, the portrayal of the third place finishers as “losers [receiving] bronze medals” discredits the athletic success of winning an Olympic medal. Instead of representations as Olympic medal winners in a debut sport, these women are depicted as illegitimate medal recipients for winning only one or two matches.

The perception of tokenism is also reinforced by the repetition of the idea that female boxers need to earn their place in the sports world. Within the sample of articles about women’s boxing, 55% included a statement that the women’s boxing events needed to prove they were worthy of a spot in the Olympics. Besides claiming that “[w]omen’s boxing needs to show its worth” (Dwyre, 2012, August 7, p. V.6), most of these proclamations also suggest that the female boxers’ main intention was to prove this rather than win a gold medal. In other words, the women should be content to participate in a historic moment, as seen in this example, “[m]ore than gold medals, the women are fighting for respect. They say they came here intent on proving that they are not a sideshow, but a spectacle worthy of being the main event” (Crouse, 2012, August 9, p. B.17). According to this excerpt, the women’s primary goal was to earn respect and put on a good performance.

However, upon losing her semifinal bout, and therefore, the possibility of a gold medal, U.S. boxer Marlen Esparza said, “I can’t be angry about winning a [bronze] medal at all. But it wasn’t my goal. I thought I was going to win” (Baxter, 2012, August 9, p. V.5). Another U.S. competitor, Queen Underwood, offered similar statements when she was eliminated from the event after losing her qualifying match, “[h]istory doesn’t mean anything to me. The gold medal meant more... I gave away half my life for this and it just doesn’t feel like the reward of being here is enough” (Baxter, 2012, August 6, p. V.4). Both of these competitors clearly state their main objective was to win a gold medal, which contradicts the notion that they were there primarily to promote the sport. By insinuating the women of the boxing competition were there to serve as representatives of the potential of the sport, their status as elite athletes and Olympians is diminished. Additionally, the assumption that they should be satisfied with participating places an emphasis on their gender identity rather than their identity as boxers.

Of the 17 articles covering the men’s boxing events, 12 were critical of the male boxers who did not win any medals. These boxers and their performances were described as “disappointing” and “embarrassing.” This juxtaposes the women, who were critiqued for the high probability of winning a medal. The difference in newspaper coverage frames the male boxers as elite athletes who did not meet their goals of winning, while the female boxers are framed merely as participants. This trivialises their efforts to compete at the event, as well as their performances, and supports the perception of female boxers as illegitimate athletes.

2.3.2. Unfeminine Boxers and the 2012 London Olympic Games

The media has played a major role in leading audiences to believe sports are “gender-appropriate” (Hardin & Greer, 2009). This means that people assume that certain sports are better suited for either men or women, and a few are generally considered gender-neutral (Koivula, 2001). According to Cohen (2001), the media largely ignores women in “masculine” sports, and when they do, they deflect the “image problem” by emphasising heterosexuality. As this thesis has stated on multiple occasions, boxing is considered to be a highly masculine sport, and therefore, the women who participate in it are assumed to be masculine, as well (Dortants & Knoppers, 2012).

The data collected in this study presented juxtaposing portrayals of female boxers, as they were simultaneously depicted as extremely violent and traditionally feminine. Coverage of the women’s boxing events used words and phrases representative of excessive violence, which are presented in Table 5.3.

Data analysis revealed that 36% of the articles about the women’s events used descriptors that portrayed the boxers as exceptionally violent. Although boxing is a combat sport based upon physical contact, the female boxers were presented in a violent manner that did not include the technical aspects of the sport. In the coverage of the men’s events, 70% of the articles used terms to describe technical boxing movements, such as “jab,” “counter,” and “slip.” On the other hand, only 18% of the articles about the women’s events used technical boxing terms to describe their performances.

Table 5.3.

Violent Descriptive Words and Phrases Describing Women's Boxing at the 2012 London Olympic Games

Newspaper	Date	Description
The New York Times	July 28, 2012	-“devastating hitter” (Bearak, p. D.1)
Los Angeles Times	August 6, 2012	-“slugfest” (Baxter, p. V.4) -“take her rage out” (Baxter, p. V.4)
The Sydney Morning Herald	August 7, 2012	-“beaten up” (Hinds, p. 7) -“detach each other’s retinas” (Hinds, p. 7) -“crunching blows” (Hinds, p. 7) -“bloodlust” (Hinds, p. 7)
The New York Times	August 10, 2012	-“a world of loose teeth, black eyes and busted noses” (Bearak, p. B.9)

While these descriptions illustrate an image of excessive violence, the media coverage also heavily emphasised characteristics of hegemonic femininity. This included highlighting motherhood, displays of emotions (especially “crying,” “sobbing,” and “weeping”), and boxers’ physical appearances. Indian boxer Chungneijang Mery Kom Hmangte was mentioned in two articles, and both included her role as a mother. One of the articles positioned this sign of heteronormativity against a violent description of her performance:

[She] was in tears. She could not be at home in India with her twin sons on their fifth birthday. However, the 29-year-old, five-time world champion had just

given her darling boys the best present they could have hoped for. Mummy had beaten up a Polish woman (Hinds, 2012. August 7, p. 7).

The same article pointed out that Australian boxer Naomi-Lee Fischer-Rasmussen chose to wear a skirt to look feminine while simultaneously masculinising her opponent and her physical actions by stating, “[o]r at least as feminine as one can look while trying to jam a fist down the throat of a Swedish Amazon” (Hinds, 2012. August 7, p. 7). Instead of using boxing terminology, the author uses acts of aggressive violence to describe their actions. Rather than describe the results of the matches or the competitors’ performances, the author presents facts that demonstrate hegemonic femininity, such as motherhood and wearing a skirt. It is also noteworthy that the image of the “Swedish Amazon” is compared to the only boxer in a skirt. The contrasting images uphold the belief that athleticism and femininity are contrasting traits (Vincent, 2010), as well as reassure audiences that the masculinised athlete is the one straying from “normal” gender expectations.

Women in the ring are a stark contrast to the masculinity and violence that are associated with boxing (Hargreaves, 1997). Audience perceptions of athletes are heavily influenced by gender (Jones & Greer, 2011; Knight & Giuliano, 2003), and the assumption that physical force is a masculine trait is taken into account. The excessive use of violent descriptors indicates that journalists are attempting to convince audiences that female boxers have the aggressive traits many believe are necessary to participate in the sport. In doing so, however, female boxers are framed as masculine and straying from hegemonic norms. This is why the violent descriptions are immediately followed or preceded by descriptions of femininity. Another way to emphasise hegemonic femininity is to hypersexualise female athletes, which is presented in the following subsection.

2.3.3. Sexualised Boxers and the 2012 London Olympic Games

The data collected in this study did not show an overt sexualisation of female boxers at the 2012 London Olympic Games. One article found in *The New York Times*, featuring Irish boxer Katie Taylor, shifted from focusing on her boxing career to her romantic life. As the article details Taylor's introduction to the sport, it then offers a statement from her mother, "I suppose, eventually, she would love to be in a relationship. She's been on a few dates" (Bearak, 2012, August 10). The quote is completely out of context as the story immediately shifts back to Taylor's training regime. Furthermore, the statement provided by the mayor of her hometown offers, "[s]he's attractive, too" (Bearak, 2012, August 10). Another article in *The Sydney Morning Herald* described Taylor as, "[d]ark-haired, deep-eyed and engaging" (Hanlon, 2012, August 8, p. 9).

The lack of overt sexualisation in the media coverage of the women's boxing events aligns with the findings of Cooky et al. (2015). Their research found that trivialising hypersexualisation of women's sport had decreased between 2009 and 2014. However, they found that this was replaced by a practice of framing female athletes in their roles as mothers, which was presented in the previous subsection. The lack of hypersexualisation in the collected data is also surprising because of the pornification of women's boxing (Halbert, 1997; Hargreaves, 1997). However, the event itself played into this pornification.

Before the first women's match commenced, "local organisers spoiled things by sending eight women in form-fitting Lycra outfits into the ring first to pantomime boxing moves to the beat of Labelle's 'Lady Marmalade'" (Baxter, 2012, August 6, p. V.4). The Olympic Games, which serve as the largest global stage for sport, presented audiences with a sexualised display of women's boxing. Thus, the event's organisers

actually created a perception of sexualisation and “foxy” boxing, as viewers had not yet seen what the competition actually looked like. However, it is not just the institutions of media and sport that perpetuate gendered perception of female boxers. The following section will discuss the role of boxing culture in creating and generating these ideas.

3. Boxing Culture

According to Schein (1990), culture is, “what a group learns over a period of time as that group solves its problems of survival in an external environment and its problems of internal integration” (p. 111). This learning process is a simultaneously behavioural, cognitive, and emotional development. Observable artefacts, values, and basic underlying assumptions all contribute to the manifestation of the culture of a specific group or organisation (Martin & Meyerson, 1988; Schien, 1990).

Organisational culture produces meanings of gender that are circulated and reproduced in a contained environment, but also influence a larger cultural image (Acker, 1990). This section will discuss how gendered beliefs, practices, and interactions in boxing culture influence and contribute to the creation and promulgation of perceptions of female boxers.

3.1. Boxing Culture and Invisible Female Boxers

The data collected in this study show the social perception of female boxers as invisible is achieved by the preservation of the boxing gym as a male space. When female boxers are in the gym, their existence cannot be denied by others in that space as they are physically present. However, if someone unfamiliar to the place were to enter the gym while there were no female boxers, he or she would be unaware of their

existence due to the lack of other indications, such an abundance of images of male boxers with very few, if any, images of female boxers.

During participant observation at Gym X, the researcher documented the common occurrence of men outnumbering women. In fact, unless the researcher was observing a boxing circuit class, she was the only woman in the gym approximately 50% of the time she was there. Analysis of field notes shows the novice boxing class at Gym X regularly consisted of five to twelve participants. On some occasions, there were up to 25 participants in attendance. Over the course of the year in which participant observation took place, only four women, excluding the researcher, participated in this class. All other participants were men. The data show similar findings for Gym X's competition class. This class, consisting of the gym's amateur and professional boxers, averaged between 10 and 15 attendees. In most situations, the researcher was the only female boxer, and in the cases she was not, the gym's only female trainer, who was also a professional boxer, was the only other woman in attendance over 70% of the time. On a few occasions, female boxers from other gyms attended the class to participate in sparring. The data show four women did this over the year-long period.

These data were supplemented with accounts from interviewees who frequent other training facilities who stated they were usually the only women present in their gyms while they train. Of the 30 female boxers interviewed, 27 stated they usually train with men. 18 then said they are usually the only female in the gym at a given time, and 10 said they are the only competitive female boxer at their gym.

The only times there was a relatively even distribution of men and women at Gym X was during the boxing circuit classes. These classes repeatedly consisted of similar numbers of men and women, and female participants outnumbered male

participants on several occasions. This phenomenon will be further discussed in section 4 of this chapter, but the lack of female participants in the technical boxing classes plays a role in circulating the perception of the female boxer as invisible. From an outside perspective, it would appear that female boxers are non-existent due to the high probability of joining or witnessing a technical box class that only includes men. Participants in a novice class, especially those who are only just introduced to the sport, might even fall to the assumption that women do not box if they consistently only see men in the gym.

While the physical presence of female boxers in the gym may be low, there is also a marked lack of acknowledgments of women in the space. For example, during the time of participant observation at Gym X, there were approximately 80 boxing posters on the walls (posters were added or removed during the course of this study), as seen in Figure 5.2. These posters featured professional and amateur boxers, most of whom are not affiliated with the gym. Only seven posters included at least one woman. Of these seven, two of them displayed women as ring girls and only three featured the gym's lone professional female boxer.



Figure 5.2. Example of boxing posters at Gym X

Besides the lack of female boxers on the gym's posters, the facilities are mostly catered to a male population. Gym X has one locker room (see Figure 5.3), which is used as a changing area, one men's toilet, and one women's toilet. The locker room is used by both men and women; however, the men routinely change clothes in the open area while the women change in the enclosed shower or bathroom. When speaking to the female gym members, the majority said that they felt more comfortable dressing in an area where they would not be seen by a man.



Figure 5.3. Changing area shared by men and women at Gym X

During busy times at the gym, the lack of a female changing area and a single toilet often forced women to wait in a queue in order to change in privacy. The men, on the other hand, invariably changed in the locker room without waiting, even if a female was in the room. Becky, a female gym member, explained that she usually called into the locker room before entering in order to see if any men were changing. She said that

while other female members did not mind being in the room while men were changing, she was uncomfortable with the situation and would rather wait to access the room. The women's habit of waiting to change in the bathroom is noteworthy because it implies that the male gym members are given priority to the shared locker room. Even though the gym's owner distinctly said the locker room is intended for use by both female and male members, the women's assumption that they would be the ones to find alternative changing areas suggests male dominance of the space.

Multiple female boxers who provided interviews discussed similar situations they experienced during their boxing careers. Although some said they did not mind changing in front of men, 18 interviewees said they had to look for alternative spaces in which to change on at least one occasion. An additional four also explained they sought changing areas away from men when they began boxing, but have since decided it was no longer necessary. Theresa, an amateur boxer in California, explained why this is a frustrating situation:

At the comps, the guys change wherever they want. You just see them drop down to their [underwear] when it's time to get ready. I always get dressed in the bathroom, which can be kind of weird if your opponent is in there, too. But because it's a regular bathroom there's usually a line because all the girls in the audience use it, too. And sometimes they see you holding your uniform so they know you're fighting and they start talking to you, but I'm always nervous before my fights so I don't like talking to people before. But, I mean, you're just hanging out waiting in the bathroom and I don't want to be rude so I do.

Theresa's account indicates that the lack of female space at competitions does not give her the same privilege to prepare away from spectators that the male boxers receive. A

professional boxer from Queensland, Samantha, also described her experiences at boxing events:

I've had a few fights where I had to share a change room with the ring girls. Sharing with them doesn't bother me, but the annoying part is it sometimes seems like an afterthought. Like, they didn't have space to put me so they just threw me in there. But then my [male] coaches have to leave the room if the girls need to change or there isn't really enough room to warm up so I have to go somewhere else anyway.

The problem for female boxers of not having appropriate designated space, as well as assuming that shared space has male precedence, is that it does not acknowledge their presence in the sport. Additionally, it serves to undermine their efforts to be seen as serious athletes.

Butler (1998) argues that women's sports can be a domain in which the, "ordinary sense of what constitutes a gendered body is itself dramatically contested and transformed" (p. 3). However, modern-day boxing provides, "the fantasy of a stable masculinity" during a period in which gender expectations have become increasingly flexible, which puts masculinity "in crisis" (Woodward, 2006; p. 128). Gym and boxing culture, therefore, is able to avoid contesting the preservation of hegemonic masculinity by removing the presence of women. By ignoring or refusing to acknowledge female boxers, whether intentional or not, women's boxing does not pose a threat to boxing's lasting image as the ultimate masculine sport. However, in doing so, the social perception of female boxer as non-existent is reinforced. Both those outside and inside of the sport are continuously surrounded by impressions that the sport is purely a male space.

3.2. Boxing Culture and Illegitimate Athletes

Data analysis highlighted gym culture and practices as factors in the reinforcement of the social perception of female boxers as illegitimate athletes. The data show that hegemonic gender expectations influence the interactions between male and female boxers during training, which often places the women in positions that suggest they do not possess the same level of boxing ability as the men. Although this is obviously true in some cases, as boxers with varying levels of skills and experience trained together on multiple occasions, the data illustrate a consistent assumption that the women were of a lower calibre.

During analysis of the field notes recorded during participant observation at Gym X, a trend of coaches pairing female boxers together despite differences in size or experience emerged. On 93% of occasions when two women were present, they were paired together to perform drills or exercises. Of these times, 80% showed inconsistent matches, meaning the weight or skill level of the women was significantly different. These included multiple occasions of partnering a woman who weighed 93 kilograms with a woman who weighed 58 kilograms, as well as pairing an amateur boxer with six fights against a novice with none. The pairing of female boxers is noteworthy because there were often men of similar weight or boxing ability who could have been paired with the women. While some of the boxers in the gym discussed advantages of training with fighters of varying levels of experience, most explained weight difference was not typically beneficial to training.

For example, one of Gym X's female boxers, Tiffany, was assigned to perform drills with the researcher. There was a weight difference of approximately 30 kilograms between the two women, and 16 male boxers were also participating in the drills. As Tiffany approached the researcher, she rolled her eyes and said in a sarcastic tone, "[o]f

course the girls have to play together.” When asked about the situation after the training session, Tiffany expressed frustration, “[d]oesn’t matter who it is, the girls always get paired up together. And it doesn’t help me to get hit by some itty-bitty thing jumping around. There were at least seven boys here today who weigh the same as I do.” Not only does Tiffany indicate the pairing of female boxers is a default, but her training was affected negatively because of it.

The data collected in interviews revealed consistent findings. While the instances at Gym X were the result of the coaches matching the women together, interviewees explained that this occurrence could also be a result of male boxers choosing not to pair with them. Ally, an amateur boxer, discussed this phenomenon at her gym in Queensland:

When Coach says partner up, most of the time I’m stuck with whoever is left over, which is the person no one wants to work with. Sometimes it’s a new guy, and then you can’t really do the drill because he doesn’t know the basics yet, or it’ll be someone who just isn’t any good. I’ve had more fights than a lot of these guys, but I still have to work with the dude who can’t throw a proper jab.

When asked why she thought she was not chosen by her teammates of equivalent experience, Ally stated she believes it is because of her gender. While it does not automatically mean that the male boxers think less of her as an athlete, those who witness the constant grouping of female boxers despite weight, skill, and availability of training partners may formulate beliefs that they do so because they are not capable of training with men. The constant comparison to male boxers can strengthen perceptions of women as lesser boxers because they are continuously separated from the men despite appearing within the same space.

The experiences of female boxers are unique because their training is usually with men, whereas other sports implement constant separation of males and females. Sport has been used as means to illustrate the differences between men and women, and more specifically, how women are identified by how they are different to men (Couturier & Chepko, 2001). The boxing gym upholds this by bringing women into a male space, but implementing practices that continue to put them in the position where they are not viewed as capable as their male teammates. When those in the gym continually practice separating the female boxers from the men, it implies that the women are able to occupy the space, but are still not qualified enough to fully integrate into the male dominated group. In other words, they may participate to a degree, but not at a level equal to the male boxers. Therefore, when women participate in the sport, it is at a subpar level.

3.3. Boxing Culture and Unfeminine Women

The perception of female boxers as unfeminine is perpetuated by gym practices that actually aim to incorporate women into the group. This study found that a common way for boxing gyms and members to bring female boxers into the group was to treat them “like one of the guys.”

In this study, 20 interviewees discussed times when they felt they were treated in a manner that would not usually be replicated towards a woman outside of the boxing gym. This included language directed towards them, name calling, and comments regarding their weight and physical appearances. They explained these occurrences were due to the fact that they were not viewed as “regular” women when they were in the gym.

The researcher witnessed one such interaction at Gym X between two of the competitive boxers. The female boxer (FB) outperformed the male boxer (MB) in training drill. Upon completion of the drill, MB turned to FB and said loudly, “[y]eah, you know what? You can suck my cock!” Both MB and FB laughed and smiled after the statement. MB then turned towards the researcher, who had been standing nearby, and said, “[i]t’s cool. You can say shit like that to the chicks in here. They’re not girl girls.” Later, the researcher approached FB and asked what she had thought of MB’s comment. She said, “[o]h, I know they don’t mean it. They’re just joking. If a guy said that to me while I was out or something like that, then that’s a different story.” This interaction demonstrates how female boxers are not treated conventionally in the boxing gym.

The “old boys club” is recognised as key component of boxing culture and continues to exist even with the presence of women in the gym (Lafferty & McKay, 2004). This study found that in their attempts to integrate women into this “club” they treated female boxers as they would male boxers. Thus, in an effort of practicing gender neutrality and inclusion, they were actually inflicting their masculine-based culture upon female boxers. This demonstrates a practice of hegemony, as it is assumed that behaviours and beliefs do not need to change in order to incorporate female boxers. Instead, it is believed that female boxers will accept and adopt the culture that already exists. Hegemonic groups shape their values to be accepted as beneficial to everyone, which encourages subordinate communities to consent to the dominant group’s values (Gramsci, 1972; McKay, 1991). Female boxers are treated as though they are “one of the boys,” which dismisses any female identities, in a way that presents itself as a means of acceptance. Therefore, the gym’s culture does not need to change as female boxers must adapt to fit the culture that already exists. At the same time, however, female

boxers are treated in ways that would not usually be considered as socially acceptable. Furthermore, their decision to engage in this culture demonstrates individual agency, which is addressed in the next section.

3.4. Boxing Culture and Sexualisation

As detailed in Chapter IV section 5.1, participants of this study discussed experiences of receiving unwanted sexual attention during their boxing careers. While this indicates that the sexualisation of female boxers occurs in the gym, as they are viewed in a sexualised manner, the data show that a sexualisation of women in general exists in boxing and gym culture. Images of hypersexualised women are common occurrences are presence in the sport; ring card girls wear bikinis and “foxy” boxing is a form of entertainment (Sammons, 1988). Also, the blatant sexual objectification of women was revealed to be a normal practice in the “old boys club” culture.

As previously mentioned in this thesis, the belonging to a group is a highly valued aspect of participation (Filo, et al., 2009). In the boxing gym, the sexualisation of women was a way for male gym members to bond. For example, the researcher observed a regular practice of male boxers rating the appearances of any women present in the gym. This included the mothers, sisters, spouses, and friends of other gym members. The male boxers would debate the women’s appearances on a numerical scale and debate the numbers selected. While this was usually directed at women who were not boxers, it creates a culture of female sexualisation within the gym. This implies that female boxers are also sexualised within the space because the male gym members have made it a habitual practice.

The practice of sexualising women serves as a way for male gym members to identify and relate with one another. However, it is done so at the expense of female

boxers. The experiences of sexual harassment discussed in Chapter IV section 5.1 show that female boxers are also sexualised within boxing spaces. The culture's practice of sexualising women contributes to this because it is a habitual practice and has become ingrained as routine. Therefore, when a woman enters the space as a boxer, she is still viewed in a sexualised manner. While this is an indication of the role boxing and gym culture play in the creation and promulgation of perceptions of female boxers. The next section will address how the individual agency of female boxers influences perceptions.

4. Individual Agency

Individual agency refers to, “the capacity of individuals to make decisions concerning all main aspects of their lives in ways that are neither completely constrained nor completely without reference to social, economic, and family circumstances” (Evans & Strauss, 2010, p. 820). In other words, individual agency reflects a person's ability to make decisions that have been influenced by various social factors and his or her own beliefs, experiences, and knowledge. This section will present the role female boxers play through their individual agency in the production and generation of the identified perceptions.

4.1. Individual Agency and Invisible Boxers

Similar to the female athletes in Krane et al.'s (2004) research, this study found that female boxers make conscious decisions to disguise their boxing identities. The data illustrate a phenomenon of female boxers hesitating to identify as boxers both inside and outside of the gym. These attempts to divert attention from their status as boxers reinforces the notion that women boxers are invisible.

One of the ways in which this was demonstrated was through female boxers' attempts to divert attention from themselves while in the gym. Ten interviewees, or one third of the participants, spoke about their desire to be "invisible" when they were training. They explained that when they first entered the gym and began boxing, they avoided drawing attention to themselves due to feelings of uncertainty or intimidation. One Australian amateur boxer, Sam, explained that her fear of looking out of place led to her to try to "hide" during her time in the gym:

I was really scared of looking silly when I first started [boxing] so I didn't really talk to anyone. It was, like, I thought it must be so obvious to everyone that I didn't know what I was doing. Everyone would sit around talking before training, and I just stood off to the side, you know, like by myself. I wouldn't understand a drill, but I didn't want everyone to know I didn't get it so I wouldn't ask for help. I would try to hide in the back during exercises and nearly shit myself if the coach would come up to help me with something. Like, I was happy he did it because I wanted to learn, but I also didn't want everyone to think I was that person messing up.

The fear of coming across as an inadequate boxer caused Sam to try to portray an image of non-existence. She wanted to participate in the sport, but remain unseen at the same time. Crystal, an amateur boxer in California, also utilised methods to avoid drawing attention to herself:

After I went to a few training sessions, I just loved it and knew it was something I wanted to pursue. But it was kind of intimidating at first because there's people watching you and everyone is in there working on their own thing and looking like pros while they do it. So I actually went out and bought some stuff, like a jump rope and a super cheap bag, like one of those standing ones, and gloves so

I could practice at home so I wouldn't look so useless. Like, I couldn't jump rope for shit so I would practice in my garage where no one could see me, and then when I could do it for at least a couple minutes, I did it at the gym. And I'm really uncoordinated so I was having trouble with the footwork so I practiced in my living room.

Similar to Sam, Crystal was concerned about attracting attention for negative reasons. This concern actually encouraged her to remove herself from the gym despite the fact that she enjoyed boxing. These data indicate some female boxers choose behaviours, such as those depicted above, that actually promote perceptions of non-existence within the gym.

While it is possible that male boxers can experience feelings of nervousness and shyness when entering a new sport, the researcher observed that most male newcomers at Gym X were quite excited to begin training. During the course of participant observation, the researcher witnessed over 20 new male gym members join the novice boxing class. While some presented quiet demeanours, most took the initiative to introduce themselves to other gym members and openly asked for assistance when needed.

The data also show female boxers employing behaviours to suggest non-existence while outside of the gym. Sam and Crystal tried not to be seen in the gym because they feared their lack of boxing ability would be seen as a negative. Some of the interviewees in this study shared instances of downplaying their involvement in boxing. For example, one participant explained that she believed she had not earned the title of "boxer" so she would try to change the subject if it came up in conversation:

My friends will, no joke, introduce me to people as "[t]his is Kara. She's a boxer." And I get that to them it's like a compliment because it's like, oh, hi,

meet this person and here's a cool fact about them. But I feel like people expect something really big when they hear that, and I haven't really been [boxing] that long. I usually just say, "[o]h, not really. It's just for fun." Then I change the subject. Well, I try to change it.

The interviewee's actions not only deflect attention from her role as a boxer, but actually dismiss the notion that she is a boxer. Rather than say, "[y]es, I am a boxer, but it's just for fun," she denies herself the title of "boxer."

Another example of individual behaviour which promotes non-existence can be seen in Natalie's account. She explains that she believes her boxing participation has interfered with her social life, and therefore, has attempted to hide her boxing career in social settings:

Oh man, if I had a nickel for every time I was talking to a guy and then it turns into "[o]h, you fight? Well, see you later." I don't know if it's intimidation or they see me as a guy or what, but I really think it changes the way guys think of me, especially when they first meet me. So I won't say anything about [boxing] when I meet them for the first time. They'll find out later, obviously, because it's a big part of my life, and if they don't like it, well, too bad for them. But they can wait until they know more about me so I'm not just a fighter to them.

Due to concern that her identity as a female boxer will affect the way in which she is viewed, Natalie intentionally omits her boxing experience from her social interactions. While those data present a different motive for actively downplaying one's boxing participation, it also demonstrates a female boxer perpetuating non-existence.

Even though female boxers are not denying the existence of women's boxing and its athletes, they are encouraging the concept of non-existence when they deflect the opportunity to embody the role. As previously discussed in this chapter, the media and

boxing culture contribute to the perception that female boxers do not exist. However, female boxers themselves are physical proof that they do, in fact, exist. Yet, the data collected in this study indicate some female boxers are turning away from representing the sport's existence during social interactions. If the athletes themselves do not act as proof of existence, then the perception that women do not box continues to circulate. This is different to the spruiking phenomenon presented in Chapter V and illustrates the fact that feelings and choices differ among female boxers.

4.2. Individual Agency and Tokenism

As Halbert (1997) found in a study of professional female boxers, the data of this study indicate that female boxers are aware of the beliefs that they are “token” athletes or not “real” boxers. This awareness actually influenced the behaviours of many of the women interviewed. 28 interviewees explained feelings of needing to prove their boxing abilities or dedication to the sport in order to earn the title of “boxer.” Although there are some negative consequences of these actions, which were presented in Chapter V, the majority of participants detailed the need to “work harder than the boys” and be “more disciplined than the guys” in order to counter the concept of tokenism.

While most of the interview participants discussed their intentional actions to discourage the perception of female boxers as illegitimate athletes, the data revealed behaviours and thinking that perpetuate the idea of the female boxer as subpar to male boxers. Going back to the examples of Tiffany and Ally used in the previous section, both women were asked if they attempted to change the occurrence of getting paired with inadequate boxers. Both described minor attempts to change the situation, but ultimately accepted it. Tiffany explained her acceptance of working with other females even though it is not ideal:

When [the coach] is explaining a drill, I'll make sure I'm standing next to someone my size. And so far that has never been another girl. But I do it hoping he sees two people the same size next to each other and think it'll be a good match. It doesn't work though. It's still, "[y]ou girls, together." That's the extent of my attempts to change it. I haven't asked him not to do it, and I'm not going to say, "I don't want to work with her." I don't want to be a bitch.

Ally also demonstrated acceptance of the situation even though it affected her boxing experience:

I'll try to make eye contact with the guys I want to partner up with, but they look away when I do it. I know they see me trying to get their attention. A few times I would ask someone if they wanted to work together and was given the "I'm already working with so-and-so. Sorry." And they hadn't even sorted it out yet! So, you know, it is what it is, I guess.

By accepting the pairing of women despite weight and skill as a normal gym practice, the participants choose not to alter the habit by requesting a different partner or explaining the problem to their coaches. This in turn recreates the idea that women are lesser boxers, and therefore, not in the sport on boxing merit. Women's sport is continually viewed from a perspective that compares it to men's sport (Cooky et al, 2013). Its value is measured using men's sport as a standard expectation of performance. Thus, female boxers are constantly compared to male boxers, especially since they commonly occupy the same space. But when female boxers are separated from male boxers despite the opportunity to train together, it perpetuates the belief that women cannot fully integrate into the sport.

4.3. Individual Agency and Unfeminine Women

The participants in this study expressed a common belief that identifying with their fellow boxers could be achieved by displaying masculine characteristics. Therefore, they chose to adopt behaviours that are associated with masculinity to project an image that would reflect their gym's values and practices. Participants believed that boxing and gym culture valued masculinity over femininity, which influenced them to make conscious efforts to change their gender performance when they were in a boxing space.

The notion that female boxers adopt traditionally masculine characteristics and behaviours while in the boxing gym emerged as a common practice; 14 participants explained that they made an effort to seem less feminine, or “girly,” while they are in a boxing space, such as the gym or competition. Laura, an Australian amateur boxer, explained why she chose to change her demeanour to come across as less feminine:

I have this mentality where I'm not a girl anymore when I walk through [the gym] door. I can be cute out there, but in here I have to show that I'm tough enough to do this, and that means I can't show up in pink and have my make-up on. It's like when I see girls all done up while they're on the treadmill. What are you doing?! That's what it would be like if I came in here like that, but a hundred times worse [laughter].

Laura states that she changes her appearance, which she associates with her femininity, so that she is not seen as a “girl” when she enters the gym. Another participant explained attitudinal characteristics that she maintained in the boxing gym:

I make myself act a little tougher when I'm in the gym. I'm a pretty sensitive person, and things really get to me. If my coach comes down on me hard, I really take it to heart. Sometimes it's been really hard not to cry when he's

laying it on me. I think they expect me to break, but I won't because I know it will be so much worse because I'm a girl. I'm worried they'll think less of me. By maintaining a "tough" demeanour, the participant believes she is seen as more credible, and she views crying as an indicator of femininity.

Participants of this study show how female boxers choose to adopt the values and behaviours of boxing culture, which upholds masculinity. This shows that a hegemonic system does in fact exist within the sport's culture. Hegemony is not achieved by force, but by rooting the ideas of the dominant group into the consciousness of the subordinate (Donaldson, 1993). The values and beliefs of the higher group are accepted as the norm. The boxing gym is a place of systemic hegemonic masculinity. According to Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), hegemonic masculinity maintains men in dominant positions over women. This is true in the boxing setting, and it is done through cultural practices that female boxers choose to adopt.

4.4. Individual Agency and Sexualisation

As demonstrated in Chapter VI section 5.2, some female boxers choose to present themselves in ways that emphasise hegemonic femininity. Participants in this study explained that one way to achieve this is to display their heterosexuality. This offers a different perspective than the one presented by participants who made conscious efforts to hide indicators of femininity.

Overall, the participants in this study did not indicate that they consciously chose to hypesexualise themselves. Three participants stated that they wore makeup when training at the gym because they "just liked it" or preferred to wear makeup in public. None of the participants said that they wore it with the intention of being viewed in a sexualised manner.

Of the nine professional boxers interviewed in this study, five discussed how they have portrayed themselves in a sexualised manner at some point in their boxing careers. Two of the participants explained that they did so with the objective of gaining sponsorship or media attention. The remaining chose to do so for their personal enjoyment. Vanessa explained her decision to portray herself in a hypersexualised manner, “I like the way I look, and I like to be feminine, so why not? Plus, I think it’s pretty liberating.” Vanessa demonstrated her ability to make a conscious decision to present herself in a manner of her choosing. While the findings revealed that some female boxers contribute to the promulgation of a sexualised perception of female boxer through their individual agency, they also indicate a variety of motives for such choices. Those who chose to portray themselves in a manner that emphasised their heterosexuality because they felt it would improve their boxing careers suggest a possible feeling of obligation. In other words, they must portray themselves a certain way in order to succeed in the sport. This motive differs from those who chose to do so to fulfil their personal enjoyment.

5. Summary

This chapter investigated the sources that contribute to the creation and promulgation of social perceptions of female boxers. Using a socio-feminist perspective of masculinity, it was found that institutional, organisational, and individual levels shape the way that female boxers are viewed. It is a complex intersection that shows that hegemonic concepts of masculinity and gender are interwoven into multiple layers of the sport.

The Olympic debut of women’s boxing at the 2012 London Olympic Games presented conflicting perceptions of female boxers. The adequate amount of media

coverage given to the women's events indicate a positive reception, which is not reflective of the perceptions identified in this study. However, the content of the coverage heavily contributed to notions of "tokenism" and showcased the media's belief that women's sports must be accompanied by emphasised femininity.

The culture that exists within the boxing gym preserves the sport as a masculine domain. Male boxers are granted the privilege of inherently owning the space and implementing their values, beliefs, and behaviours of masculinity at the assumption that female boxers will integrate into that culture. Lastly, female boxers choose to adopt certain behaviours and beliefs that contribute to the creation and promulgating of the identified perceptions. The next chapter will investigate how these perceptions influence the connection female boxers have with the sport.

Chapter VI

The Influence of Perceptions on Female Boxers’ Connection to the Sport

1. Introduction

Chapter VI introduces the use of the PCM to address the research question: how do perceptions of female boxers affect the boxers' connections to the sport? In this study, the PCM is used to better understand the psychological connections female boxers have with the sport while focusing on the role perceptions have in influencing these bonds. Four common gendered perceptions were identified in Chapter IV, which are: invisible characters, unfeminine women, illegitimate athletes, and sexualised characters.

The PCM has been established as a reliable tool to apply to sport participants (Beaton et al., 2009; Evans, 2013; Funk et al. , 2011). Additionally, Funk and James (2006) called for future studies to incorporate, “social-structural differences related to gender, culture, or other demographic characteristics” (p.210) in relation to exploring the formation of allegiance. This chapter will first present the results showing that female boxers do, in fact, demonstrate attachment and allegiance to the sport of boxing. In demonstrating this, the influences of gendered perceptions will also be discussed in how female boxers come to form attachment or allegiance with the sport. Next, Beaton's (2010) suggested stage of ambivalence will be discussed, as data analysis revealed some female boxers displayed signs of ambivalence. Participants expressed negative sentiments toward the sport, which were related to negative perceptions.

2. Attachment and Allegiance among Female Boxers

Despite the gendered perceptions of female boxers established in Chapter IV, participants in this study demonstrated signs of attachment and allegiance to boxing. Funk and James (2001) state that, “the key difference between attachment and allegiance rests in the individual's commitment to the relationship” (p. 140). Since this

study did not measure degrees of commitment as to definitively state if participants occupy the attachment or allegiant stages of the PCM, they will be presented together. As all participants of this study were participants of the sport, they do not occupy the awareness stage, which exhibits knowing that a sport exists (Funk & James, 2001). Attachment and allegiance are distinguished from the attraction stage primarily by the sport taking on a personal meaning and importance (Funk & James, 2006). This section presents results indicating attachment and allegiance among female boxers, which is divided into the following subsections: personal meaning, centrality, and external actions.

2.1. Personal Meaning

During interviews, female boxers were asked the following questions: 1) what does the sport of boxing mean to you?; 2) how has boxing affected your life?; 3) what makes someone a boxer?; and, 4) do you identify as a boxer? The purpose of these questions was to establish if the sport held intrinsic meaning to the participant, and if so, what that meaning is. Identifying intrinsic meaning of the sport signifies an individual as past the attraction phase and into attachment or allegiance. This section is divided into three subsections that present common personal meanings identified during data analysis. The first subsection is empowerment, followed by boxing as an escape, and lastly, boxing as a means of individualisation.

2.1.1. Empowerment

Personal meanings and importance of boxing emerged during data analysis, demonstrating attachment and allegiance among female boxers. Of the 30 interviewees, only four stated that boxing was simply a sport, hobby, or way to exercise. While these

four participants expressed enjoyment from boxing, they did not exhibit the sport holding an emotional meaning. However, the majority of female boxers voiced some type of intrinsic meaning and boxing was a part of their self-concept.

Boxing as a form of both mental and physical empowerment was a dominant theme of intrinsic meaning to emerge from the data. When explaining how boxing has affected their lives, 16 participants used variants of the words “strength” and “strong” in relation to themselves. Participants stated that boxing gave them feelings of strength they had never experienced prior to participation and spoke of this in a positive manner. Jen, a professional boxer in Queensland, discussed her feelings:

I don't know if I can ever really explain what this sport has done for me. It's made me so much stronger; my body and my mind. I remember the moment that it clicked for me. I had been training for probably six months or so and been sparring, hard sparring, for about a month. And one day, I finished some hard sparring rounds, got out of the ring, and thought, “*you* just did that. *You're* doing this.” I had gone four rounds of sparring when I used to die after two rounds on the bag. I had gone four rounds knowing I belonged in there with him, and I was just as good [as him]. And I've carried that feeling with me every day since. At work, in relationships, the ups and downs of life. I know I can push myself further than I ever thought possible, and I'm that much stronger for it.

Jen's realisation of her physical and mental strength has contributed to boxing taking on personal importance. She associates her feelings of strength to boxing, even when she describes unrelated aspects of her daily life.

Another respondent stated how her experiences in boxing gave her the empowerment to leave an abusive relationship. As Mal, a corporate boxer in New South Wales, explains, gaining physical strength contributed to becoming mentally stronger:

Boxing saved my life, and I don't say that to be dramatic. But I was in a really bad relationship. My ex-boyfriend used to abuse me verbally and he would hit me. I was depressed and coping with some bad stuff, like drugs and drinking. I joined the [boxing] gym because he told me I was getting fat, and it was close to work so I joined just for the fitness classes. But the more I came, the more I wanted to try to do more. Everyone was so welcoming, and every time I topped myself, I was on top of the world. Like, I got 15 push-ups instead of 10. It started small, but the more physical challenges I topped, the more it sank in, "I can do hard things." When I started training to have a fight, I realised, I'm not about to let anyone hit me in the ring, so why should I anywhere else? I moved out that night.

Boxing was a part of Mal's growth in both body and mind, which helped her to leave a disempowering situation. She was able to connect with her strength of character and attributes that to boxing. The sport has taken on emotional meaning that is personal to her and her self-concept of strength.

These examples demonstrate how boxing has taken on an intrinsic meaning as a source of empowerment for female boxers and signifies attachment. The importance of women gaining physical strength in order to become physically liberated (McCaughy, 1997) exhibits how women can benefit from participating in the sport. Women are often socialised from childhood to use their bodies in restricted, apologetic ways that result in an, "entire lack of trust in [their] bodies to carry [them] to [their] aims" (Young, 1990, p. 146). Breaking free of gendered embodiment and using their bodies to perform strengthening movements gave female boxers the ability to develop new forms of embodiment. Similar to Castelnovo and Guthrie's (1998) findings in a female only dojo, women becoming empowered through boxing exceeds simply becoming

physically stronger. It expands to the strengthening of the mind, as well. As the data illustrate, the feelings of empowerment transcend the boundaries of the gym and carry into other aspects of the participants' lives.

2.1.2. Boxing as an Escape

Another theme to emerge from the data in regards to the sport holding personal meaning, is boxing as an escape from daily life. Seven interviewees described boxing as a means to temporarily forget about daily stresses and focus on the enjoyment that the sport provided. For example, amateur boxer Nancy explained how she is able to ignore stresses that are bothering her while she is boxing:

It doesn't matter what problems I have when I'm in the gym and my gloves are on. The only thing you can think about when you're in here is what you are doing at that exact moment. There could be drama with my boyfriend, my boss threw another task at me, I got a parking ticket, whatever. None of it exists when I'm punching. I'm in my happy place, and I feel good for that hour or two.

This statement exemplifies how boxing serves as an opportunity to escape from daily life and provides a sense of enjoyment for Nancy.

Funk and James (2006) argue that this is a part of the attachment process. They explain that an individual might be attracted to a sport because it is a way to escape every day life, but attachment and allegiance only occur when, "that individual begins to place greater meaning on creating an alternate mental world supported by functional knowledge and a pleasant reaction to the experience" (Funk & James, 2006, p. 206). Thus, Nancy demonstrates attachment because she not only gets a sense of escape through boxing, but feelings of happiness, as well.

Boxing was also described as an escape because it served as an emotional outlet for participants, which allowed them to express feelings of anger or frustration. This is noteworthy because participants stated that they felt like they could not openly express these feelings in another manner that achieved the same sense of satisfaction. Kelly, a professional boxer in Victoria, discussed how boxing was a way to release anger:

Hitting the bag is my therapy. There's nothing like it. I mean, I guess I talk to my friends or boyfriend if I'm mad or frustrated about something, but that always feels restrained. I feel like I have to hold back, and I can't really just let it out. In the gym, I can hit the bag, or a person [laughter] as hard as I can and yell and grunt and curse and no one gives a fuck. All the aggression I've been holding in all day and after biting my tongue at work, it all comes out with every [motions knocking her fists together].

Amateur boxer, Christina, offered similar sentiments and explained that boxing was a “way to let all [her] aggression out without losing [her] boyfriend.” She stated that if she were to openly express her feelings of anger or aggression in a similarly satisfactory manner to her friends, then she would “scare” them away. When asked why she thought that, she elaborated:

I think women usually feel like they have to hold back their anger so that they're not called crazy or psycho. I'm not saying guys can go around beating on people whenever they're mad, but people see it as perfectly normal if a guy is mad and shows it. If a woman is mad, it's weird. It's ok for us girls to be happy or sad or scared, but just being really, physically mad isn't normal. So even if I talk to my friends about something I'm mad about, I downplay it.

Christina's statement provides evidence that she believes her gender identity does not allow her to express her emotions as she would ideally like to. Thus, she relies on

boxing as a platform to openly express feelings of anger and frustration. She is able to escape the gendered restraints that she feels hinder her emotional expression in her daily life.

The notion of boxing as an escape from daily life in regards to gendered social restraints is further evidenced by participants' statements that they do not have to "act like a girl" while boxing. According to professional boxer, Crystal, boxing allowed her to "be herself" without worrying about fitting into hegemonic norms of gender expression:

There was a bit of an adjustment period [when I joined the gym]. I mean, the guys were trying to figure out if I was legit, and I was trying not to stand out too much. But once I got over that, oh man! It's the one place besides home where I can really just be myself. My hair can be a mess, and I don't have to wear makeup. I can cuss like a sailor and spit, and no one will tell me to act like a girl. Well, sometimes the boys do, but they're always joking.

Crystal indicates that she feels social pressures that limit her ability to "be herself" outside of her home. Her references to her appearance, such as hair and makeup and certain behaviours imply that she believes she should "act like a girl" in her daily life. However, the boxing gym provides a space that gives her freedom from these gendered expectations. When asked why she did not feel the need to "act like a girl" in the gym, Crystal responded, "I'm basically one of the boys when I'm in the gym. They don't see me as a girl so no one expects me to be girly."

Christina and Crystal describe boxing as an escape from "doing" gender as they are expected to in their daily lives. As Lorber (1994) explains, gender is "done" through body movement, social interactions, physical appearance, displays of emotion, language, and behaviours. Both participants describe ways to "do" gender that display a female

identity; Christina describes suppressing aggressive emotions and Crystal describes physical traits and behaviours. However, they state that they do not feel the obligation to perform these gender identifications while they are boxing. More significantly, they express feelings of enjoyment from participating in an activity that gives them a sense of freedom from a need to acceptably “do” gender. As Crystal explained, she is not viewed as feminine in the traditional way that her male peers usually perceive women. This allows her to reject pressures to uphold hegemonic displays of female gender identity. While not necessarily perceived as unfeminine, the participants enjoy the fact that they are not confined to traditional expectations of women while they are in the gym. This adds complexity to Funk and James’ (2006) suggestion that sport as an escape from daily life is a factor in the attachment process. Female boxers demonstrate that escaping the expectation to appropriately “do” gender contributes to their attachment to the sport.

2.1.3. Individualisation

Lastly, participants of this study showed that boxing was a way for them to experience a sense of individualisation, as they felt their participation in the sport made them unique from other women. Not only did boxing provide a platform to differentiate themselves from other women, but the participants were proud of their unique experiences as female boxers. Data analysis identified 12 participants who demonstrated the concept of attaining individualisation through boxing. Of these participants, eight also stated that the chance to participate in a sport that was considered unusual for women drove their decisions to start boxing.

According to Woodward (2006), boxing is, “characterised by corporeal contact, courage, danger... and violence,” and one should expect to find, “strong ties to more

traditional, gendered identities in boxing” (p. 2). This means that boxing is strongly associated with traditional values of masculinity, and therefore, boxers are usually gendered in ways that uphold hegemonic perceptions. Yet, it is this strong connection to epitomising masculinity that gives female boxers a sense of individualisation from other women. Tina explained how her view of boxing as “badass” motivated her to participate in the sport:

I missed playing organised, competitive sports so I looked up a list of all the clubs at my [university]. I saw boxing and thought it sounded pretty badass. I started to really consider it and realised I didn’t know girls who boxed. Then I thought, “[w]ell, I can be that girl.” It was a chance to do something that people wouldn’t really expect a girl to do.

Professional boxer Dana’s statement also provides of an example of achieving a sense of individualisation:

I think boxing makes me different from other girls. But I like that. It’s a good kind of different. Like, if you think about it, there’s not many people who can say they have gotten in the ring and have had a go. And there’s even less girls who can say that. But I can. I can say that. [Smiles] That’s pretty fucking cool.

These statements show that the idea of identifying as unique can contribute to developing attraction; this uniqueness can also progress to allegiance through boxing participation. Not only did the participants identify as unique through their boxing identities, but they also expressed pleasure in the ability to experience individualisation.

This notion differs from Halbert’s (1997) finding that female boxers are perceived as different. In Halbert’s (1997) study, female boxers discussed how they were perceived as “different,” which they used interchangeably with “strange.” Thus, in Halbert’s (1997) study, women boxers did not associate a positive meaning with this

perception; being different or strange was a negative stereotype applied to female boxers. The participants in this study, however, also discussed perceptions of being different, but they enjoyed the thought of standing out from other women. As Woodward's (2006) description of boxing illustrates, there is a heavy emphasis on the masculinity associated with the sport. Therefore, women who participate in aggressive sport are viewed as acting outside gendered normalities (Hargreaves, 1997). While this could be an undesirable outcome, as in Halbert's (1997) case, this study found that participants were pleased to acquire a sense of individualisation through boxing.

2.2. Centrality

Centrality refers to the "progression from an externally driven, substitutable bond to an internalised and consuming identity" (Lock et al., 2012, p. 290). This internalised identification means the sport has become a part of one's daily life, which then plays an increasingly influential role in the person's decisions and behaviours. People in the awareness and attraction stages of the PCM exhibit an externally driven identity, such as the importance of socialising factors, and there is little influence on behaviours. Those in the attachment and allegiance stages, on the other hand, demonstrate a significant internalised bond with the sport or team. As this bond strengthens and becomes a more central aspect of a person's self-identification, the person's priorities shift as the sport object is favoured (Funk & James, 2001).

In this study, 17 interviewees described boxing as a factor of their self-identification and how it was a significant component of their everyday lives. In addition to these 17, six interviewees demonstrated fluctuating intensities of centrality that indicate high levels of internalised meaning and identification at certain times. These fluctuations were dependant on a variety of factors, including their competition

schedules, work commitments, and family obligations. However, they are noted as indicative of attachment or allegiance at their peaks due to their impact on daily life.

Centrality represented boxing becoming a part of daily life, as amateur boxer Jenna explains:

Well, first of all, I have training five days a week so I spend time almost every day actually boxing. But there's so much time spent planning and thinking about it. I have to plan around training. Like, I have to make sure other things don't conflict with training times and make sure I don't eat too early or too late. If I'm sparring that day, I think about what skills I want to focus on. I think about yesterday's training, what went well and what didn't. It doesn't matter if I'm at work or in class; I'm thinking about it. On the weekends, I think about what I can be doing to improve. I'll go for a run to improve my cardio; I won't stay out late because I need rest to perform well. I basically change all the other parts of my life to fit around boxing.

Jenna's statement shows that even when she was away from the gym and boxing related activities, she was still thinking about boxing. The sport played a central role in her everyday life. Furthermore, it was not simply a part of her daily life, but she prioritised it over activities.

The centrality of boxing in participants' daily lives coincided with their increasing connections to the sport. As boxing took on a growing importance in their everyday lives, the intensity of their connection to the sport progressed. This is evidenced by the ways in which participants transitioned from externally motivated attraction to internalised attachment. Natalie explained how her connection to the sport deepened as her motives to participate changed:

My husband was getting pretty lazy so I was looking for a fun way for him to exercise, and then I decided we should do it together. [Laughter] Anyway, he was shooting down all the ideas I came up with until I suggested boxing. So I signed us up, and at the beginning he was definitely more excited than I was. I did it mostly to spend some time with him. Something we could do together, you know? But after maybe three months, I decided I wanted to come more than twice a week so I quit the spin class I went to two days a week. I started going to the more advanced technique classes on my own and was in the [boxing] gym four times a week. It became not just a way to spend time with [my husband], but the thing I looked forward to every day after work.

The desire to spend time with her husband initially motivated Natalie to take up boxing. Thus, she was originally attracted to the sport by external motives. However, her relationship with the sport developed and internalised, as it became a central factor in her life. Natalie's attachment to the sport grew from an attraction dependent upon her husband's participation to an internalised attachment, which led to her ceasing alternative activities.

Jenna and Natalie's comments are indicative of other similar responses, and exemplify how boxing is a central factor in the daily lives of female boxers. This indicates occupation of the higher stages of the PCM. While the majority of participants explained this centrality was motivated by the desire to improve their boxing skills and win competitions, data showed that the perceptions of female boxers as illegitimate athletes and sexualised characters, as established in Chapter IV, also contributed to the amount of time they dedicated to the sport.

The fear of being perceived as a "token" athlete or involved in the sport to pursue men drove some female boxers to prioritise the sport in their daily lives. In order

to show that they were “serious” about the sport, participants explained that they purposefully devoted more time to boxing in attempts to showcase their dedication. For example, amateur boxer, Beth, explained:

I’m not trying to put the guys down, but I put in more time than anyone else on this team. And a lot of that is driven by the fact that I’m a girl. I have to show them that when I talk the talk and call myself a boxer, that I can actually walk the walk. They think I’m the girl trying to act tough and hang with the boys. Well, guess what? I’m not. So to show them I want to fight, I want to win, I want to learn, I show them that I’m willing to make this my life. I’ll do the extra conditioning, I’ll sacrifice social time, and I’ll sit and watch old fights.

Beth attributes her willingness to devote a significant amount of her life to boxing to the assumption that she is “trying to act tough.” Thus, her decision to prioritise her time to boxing is heavily influenced by the perception she is not a “real” boxer. Vanessa, who described the concept of “token” athletes in Chapter IV section 3.2, offered similar sentiments, “[a]ll boxers have to live the fight life. But I tell every girl who walks through these doors and says she wants to fight that you’re going to have to put in 10 times the time and work as the guys if you want to be taken seriously.” The idea that female boxers must “prove” themselves, which was discussed in Chapter IV section 3.1, propels them to centralise the sport in their lives in the hopes that it will demonstrate their credibility as boxers.

As Lafferty and McKay (2004) found, female boxers can only obtain a limited amount of “respectability” in the sport. The naturalisation of violence and aggression as signs of masculinity (Coakley, 2001) contribute to this notion, as female boxers are automatically assumed to possess lesser capability. This study found that this actually drives female boxers to exhibit high levels of dedication in efforts to earn more respect

as boxers. Krane et al. (2010) found that female athletes want to be recognised first and foremost as athletes, as well as physically and mentally strong. Participants in this study revealed similar desires, and therefore, prioritised the sport in order to promote these attributes.

2.3. External Actions

The PCM acknowledges external behaviours as indicators of an individual's psychological connection to a sport (Funk & James, 2001). Behavioural characteristics can include the consumption of sport equipment and merchandise and the use of related media. The strong desire to possess sport related products is a compelling indicator of allegiance, as it shows effort to obtain the items, perceived benefits enjoyed, and the integration of the sport into other areas of an individual's life (de Groot & Robinson, 2008). Funk et al. (2011) found that these behaviours increase as a participant progresses upwards through the stages of the PCM.

Participants in this study spoke about external actions that indicate that they have a developed relationship with the sport. Furthermore, data analysis also revealed that these external actions are sometimes performed as a means for participants to show their commitment to boxing. During the interviews, participants discussed purchasing boxing equipment and seeking out boxing related media. These reasons included the desire to improve boxing performance, “fit in” with fellow gym members, and “look the part” of a boxer. Sam explained her consumption of boxing media, “I really didn't know much about boxing; I had heard of Mike Tyson, but that was it. I looked up a bunch of videos online and watched tons of old fights and documentary shows. Then I could join the conversations in the gym.” Being well-informed on boxing history allowed

participants to show their knowledge of the sport, which Sam identified as a means to interact with the group.

In this study, 18 participants discussed instances of either regularly purchasing boxing related equipment, such as boxing gloves, headgears, and boxing boots, or routinely consuming boxing related media, such as televised events and online sources. This number excluded participants who only purchased the minimum equipment required to participate in the sport, such as a mouthguard. While these behavioural characteristics are indicators of a bond between an individual and a sport, this study found it was also a way for female boxers to counter trivialising perceptions.

Purchasing boxing related products was identified as a way for female boxers to display their commitment to the sport, and therefore, prove they were “real” boxers. Brianna explained why she chose to purchase supplementary boxing products:

The only thing my coach told me I *had* to buy was a mouthpiece and hand wraps. When I started getting serious about competing, I decided to get some boxing shoes, my own headgear for sparring, my own gloves, and that meant sparring and bag gloves. The fighters at the gym all have their own head gears and gloves so I just figured I should, too. But the shoes were the most exciting. For some reason, I don’t really know why, I mean, they’re *shoes*, but when you go to the fights and you see a fighters in regular running shoes, you just don’t take him very seriously [as a boxer]. But the guys in the boots, they look legit. And I think it’s easier for girls to look less legit in the ring than the guys. So yeah, I admit I bought them more for the look than the necessity.

The desire to look like a “real” boxer motivated Brianna to purchase boxing shoes. She associated “real” boxers with the product, and therefore, bought them with the hope that they would have the same affect for her. Another participant, amateur boxer, Felice,

stated that purchasing clothing with her gym's logo on it was prompted by her desire to be recognised as one of the gym's competitive boxers:

Our gym has different shirts that you can buy, but some of it is off limits to everyone except the people who have had a fight. You don't have to buy them, but it's a cool way to show that you're one of the fighters. Nothing against the people who aren't or anything like that. But I bought a bunch of them the day after my fight. I wanted one for every day of the week that I'm in here [laughter].

I was like, "damn right, you'd better recognise!"

Both of these examples show that the participants wanted to be recognised as "real" boxers and believed they could help project this image by consuming boxing equipment. Yet, when asked why she felt it was important to her to be recognised as one of the gym's competitive boxers, Felice explained that her gender identity was the major factor:

A lot of people in [the gym] doubted me when I started showing up. They thought I wouldn't last, and I had to work really hard to get them to accept me and my reasons for being here. So to me, the shirt represents the fact that I earned it through hard work and dedication. When I wear it, they have to say, "ok, she's not just a pretty face."

The clothing is important to Felice because she believes it will reflect her dedication and the effort she has invested in the sport, which will dispel assumptions that she is not a legitimate fighter.

Previous studies utilising the PCM have demonstrated how media use and product consumption are indicators of a participant's attachment to a sport (de Groot & Robinson, 2008; Funk et al., 2011; Funk & James, 2001). Lock et al. (2012) found that seeking media was a way for an individual to evaluate his or her knowledge in relation

to other members of the group. By comparing themselves to others in the group, the individual builds self-esteem when he or she displays greater knowledge. Similar to Lock et al.'s (2012) finding, this study found that participants were motivated to consume media and boxing products in order to better identify as a member of the boxing community. Furthermore, as exemplified by Brianna and Felice, the participants felt it was important to be recognised as a “real boxer” by those in the boxing community. However, as shown by Brianna, the clothing was not just symbolic of identifying with the group, but also symbolic of her achievements in the sport.

Krane et al. (2010) found that female athletes use “trophy clothes” as a way to display their athletic identities. This attire is meaningful to the individual and “[reflects] significant accomplishments or [symbolises] membership on an athletic team” (Krane et al., 2010, p. 184). While it is acknowledged that male boxers may attach the similar symbolic meanings to their boxing possessions, the perceptions of female boxers as invisible and illegitimate could encourage emphasised importance in their display of “trophy clothes.” If female boxers believe that they are not recognised as “real” boxers, then the ability to showcase the fact that they are could contribute to the creation of these symbolic meanings.

Another external action that indicates the depth of the bond between an individual and a sport is spruiking. Lock et al. (2012) identified spruiking as a behaviour that increases as a participant advances through the stages of the PCM. Spruiking is the promotion of the sport to others as a means to stimulate interest, as well as improve the others' opinions of the sport. Examples of spruiking include persuading friends to attend relevant events and informing them about news and successes. One of the more significant aspects of spruiking, however, is how this behaviour serves as a tool for participants to outwardly demonstrate their loyalty and commitment to the sport (Lock

et al., 2012). In this study, participants were found to demonstrate spruiking by inviting friends to participate or attend events and informing friends of boxing or gym news.

For some participants, the desire to spruik and endorse the sport to others was a result of their own enjoyment of participating. Specifically, participants wanted to share their feelings of empowerment with other women. As discussed in section 2.1.1 of this chapter, many participants felt a strong connection to boxing because it made them feel both physically and mentally empowered. Participants revealed that they wanted to share this experience with friends and family members in the hopes they would benefit in the same way. As one female boxer explained:

I think a lot of women would benefit from boxing, but they don't know about it or they don't think it's something they can do. I'm always trying to get my girlfriends to come try out a class. I'm like, "[j]ust try it! I'll come with you! It's fun!" My confidence and health have improved so much since I took up boxing, and I want them to experience that, too.

The participant's personal feelings of empowerment she gained through participation led to the external action of recommending the sport to her friends. Amateur boxer, Theresa, stated that she spoke about her sense of empowerment in order to protest arguments that women should not box:

A lot of people still think women shouldn't box because they can't handle getting hit. I hear that a lot, especially if I have any bruises or cuts on my face. They're like, "girls shouldn't get hit! It's not good for them!" Since there's such a negative connection between women and violence, I like to talk about the good things I've gotten out of it. I feel better about myself, as in my self-esteem and body image are way better, and I'm fit. I'm having fun and doing something positive.

The above quote shows how participants use their personal experiences and feelings to try to change negative perceptions of women's boxing.

The general lack of knowledge about women's boxing was identified as another motivating factor for participants to promote the sport. Ally explained,

A lot of people still don't know women are having a go [at boxing]. I think it's mostly because you don't see it very often. I'd like to see the girls get some recognition so I always really pump up my fights. I do it when the other girls fight, too. We need to get people to come out and see us in action.

Her statement shows that she focuses her efforts to promote the matches for herself and other female boxers. She is motivated by spreading the visibility of the sport.

Professional boxer, Tanya, explained that spreading awareness of the sport was important because it affected her ability to find sponsors:

Companies sponsor you because they want to be seen. A lot of my fights aren't televised or on major promotions so it's really hard for me to find sponsors; there's no payoff for them. So it's important for me that women's boxing gains some popularity, and the only way to do that is to promote and support it. That's why I'm so vocal about it.

Tanya's difficulty in finding sponsors is a common occurrence in women's sport (Hums & Snyder, 2001). While this obstacle and its effects of denying power to female athletes has been addressed in Chapter II (Hardin & Whiteside, 2010), the ways in which female athletes try to compensate for it has not. The lack of sponsorship opportunities have motivated the participant to spruik and ultimately, promote the sport to others.

As this chapter has demonstrated, participants of this study exhibit signs of attachment and allegiance to the sport of boxing. The sport has taken on emotional and symbolic meaning, become a central component of their lives, and influenced their

external actions. While these are indicators of a meaningful psychological connection, this study found that centrality and external actions were also tools for female boxers to demonstrate their commitment to the sport. They actively engaged in these practices in order to counter perceptions of illegitimacy and spread awareness of the sport. Thus, these perceptions played a role in developing attachment. However, data analysis also revealed that some participants felt negative emotions due to certain experiences during their boxing careers. As a result, participants may no longer feel an allegiance or attachment to the sport.

3. Ambivalence Among Female Boxers

While the PCM provides a tool to understand the factors of a person's psychological connection to a sport along a vertical scale, it is important to recognise movement can occur both upward and downward along the model (Funk & James, 2001). For example, an individual is capable of regressing from the attraction stage to the awareness stage upon receiving negative information about the sport. Furthermore, it is not guaranteed a person will move the entirety of the PCM, such as from the awareness stage to the peak level of allegiance (Funk & James, 2006).

Although Funk and James (2001) acknowledge that an individual might remain at a level without reaching allegiance or regress to lower levels of the PCM, the scale does not account for a participant's possible disengagement with the sport. Beaton (2010) addresses this issue by offering an extra stage of psychological connection, which is ambivalence. This stage is used to classify participants possessing low levels of commitment and intent towards the sport, as well as an overall absence of intrinsic meaning. External behaviours include the high likelihood of ending participation in the sport, spreading negative information, and decreasing or ceasing consumption of related

media and products. Beaton (2010) also notes that participants can enter the ambivalence stage at any point along the PCM.

This section presents three themes that were uncovered in the data analysis in relation to female boxers demonstrating characteristics of the ambivalence stage. The first, balancing femininity, refers to participants' experiences trying to compensate for the perception that they lack hegemonic femininity. Next, the physical consequences of boxing discusses how female boxers experience physical consequences, such as eating disorders and unnecessary injury, by attempting to either fit sexualised perceptions or contradict trivialised perceptions. Lastly, the lack of female camaraderie illustrates the ways in which a lack of connection with male gym members contributes to movement towards ambivalence.

3.1. Balancing Femininity and Boxing

The desire to maintain a balance between the seemingly conflicting identities of the female and the athlete has been recognised as a phenomenon in women's sports (Harris, 2005; Malcolm, 2003). Section 2.1.3 of this chapter discussed how some female boxers achieved a sense of individualisation through boxing, and this contributed to their attachment to the sport. They enjoyed the experience of feeling unique compared to other women. However, this study found that while some participants liked feeling different to other women, none of the participants enjoyed being perceived as lacking femininity. This indicates that while some female boxers found it favourable to be viewed as unique, they did not want to be viewed as different because they lacked traditional femininity. Furthermore, Chapter VI section 2.1.2 discussed how some female boxers saw the sport as an escape from the ways in which they were expected to "do" gender in their daily lives. The desire to maintain a female gender identity that

fulfils societal norms while also escaping them reveals the complexity of notions of gender.

In this study, eight participants expressed frustration about their perceived need to balance their identities as women and boxers. Randy, who expressed feelings of self-consciousness in Chapter IV section 4.1, explained:

It gets frustrating because you constantly have to switch from one to the other. Boxing is such a big part of my life so it's pretty hard to totally avoid the topic when I'm socialising. But I know if it comes up, guys lose all interest or it becomes a "bro" conversation. I'm single; I still want to be asked out and picked up for a date. I don't know if they're intimidated or turned off, but it's annoying. Randy's statement indicates that she believed her identity as a boxer caused men to view her differently than they would other women. She expressed a desire to be treated in the same manner as women who are perceived as traditionally feminine.

Another participant described a situation in which she was sexually assaulted and felt that her role as a boxer affected the way the police treated her:

I was attacked one night when I was out running. I went to the police station and was wearing a gym T-shirt so they asked if I was a boxer, and I said, "yeah." Then they start telling me how good it would have been if I had bashed the dude and how it was a good thing that I could hold my own. Excuse me? I'm here telling you I was assaulted so obviously I didn't really "hold my own." But thanks for making me feel like I failed. I was like, I'm still a woman and this just happened to me.

McCaughy (1997) argues that society views women's bodies as weak, which places them in a position of vulnerability to the existing "rape culture." However, the participant's experience demonstrated that the police did not view her this way, and she

contributed that to her role as a boxer. According to her account, they believed that McCaughy's (1997) idea did not apply to her because she was a boxer and assumed she had the physical capabilities to match her attacker. Ultimately, they believed that her role as a boxer negated the vulnerability she is subjected to as a woman. While it is not necessarily problematic that the police viewed her as physically strong, their belief that she is no longer subjected to society's "rape culture" (McCaughy, 1997) is. They separated her role as a boxer from her female identity.

The participants in this study indicated that experiences such as these lead to feelings of frustration. As stated by one participant, "[i]t gets tiring. I'm either trying to be really girly, if I'm outside of the gym, or one of the guys if I'm in the gym. It seems like it's always an exaggeration." The participant is trying to 'do' gender (Lorber, 1994) by emphasising displays of femininity or masculinity depending on her environment. In other words, she implies that she is always performing gender to a heightened extent in an effort to balance the contrasting ideals of the female and the athlete, which she calls "tiring."

These findings differ from those of Mennesson (2000). In her study of female boxers, she found that participants distanced themselves from traditional modes of femininity. This study, however, found that participants wanted to associate themselves with notions and displays of womanhood. However, in doing so participants experienced feeling of frustration that they associated with their identities as boxers.

3.2. Physical Consequences of Boxing

As evidenced in figure 4.1, the risk of injury is high in boxing. Participants are usually aware that engaging in a contact sport includes an inherent risk of injury. Filo et al. (2009) identified physical challenge as a factor that contributes to the development of

attachment. The findings of this study, however, suggest that female boxers are bothered by certain physical aspects of their boxing experiences.

The data revealed that some participants sustained injuries while training with men because they did not want to ask them to “lighten up” at the risk of looking like an illegitimate boxer. Nine participants spoke about times when they wanted to ask their male training partners to ease their intensity, but decided to not to so that they would not be perceived as weak. Amy, an amateur boxer, explained that she felt coming across as “soft” was worse than sustaining an injury:

In the gym, you earn respect by showing heart. If you ask someone to lighten up, you’re just going to look soft and like you shouldn’t be there. As a female, they already think that you can’t take a hit. I’d rather get busted up and make them say, “yeah, she’s got it” than make them think I can’t handle it.

This statement shows that Amy’s desire to prove she belongs in the gym among the male boxers is worth the risk of a potentially avoidable injury. The fear of looking like an illegitimate athlete influenced the participant to remain silent and work at the intensity dictated by her male training partner.

Another physical consequence some female boxers’ experience is a result of eating disorders. In this study, 13 participants openly stated that they experienced an eating disorder during their boxing careers. Of these participants, only two stated that they had an eating disorder before they began boxing. One of the participants explained that her disordered eating habits began after she obtained sponsorship:

I know my sponsors want me to look a certain way so I want to stay at my fight weight even when I don’t have a fight coming up. But it’s hard because a professional boxer’s fight weight isn’t what they usually walk around at. I became bulimic because I was worried my sponsors will drop me if I put on

weight between fights. They want me to look sexy and fit, and if I can't do that, they'll find someone who will.

The sexualisation of female boxers combines images of hegemonic femininity with boxing (Hargreaves, 1997). This creates an image that is often unrealistic for female athletes; their bodies usually possess a muscularity that does not match the expectations of hegemonic femininity (Krane et al., 2004). However, the perception of female boxers as sexualised characters reinforces the value of the bodies upheld by hegemonic femininity.

The perceptions of illegitimate athletes and sexualised characters contribute to female boxers sustaining bodily harm that might have been avoided. The fear of looking weak motivates some participants to train at a higher intensity than they are comfortable with. Additionally, the sexualisation of female boxers can contribute to disordered eating as they are expected to maintain a specific hegemonic image.

3.3. Lack of Female Camaraderie

The importance of belonging to a group in the process of attachment has been recognised in multiple studies using the PCM (de Groot & Robinson, 2008; Evans, 2013; Filo et al, 2009). In their study of a charity sport event, Filo et al (2009) found that a sense of camaraderie was a key factor in participants' attachment to the event because, "individuals believed that participants are all of a similar mindset, leading to a greater connection to both the other participants and event" (p. 371). In other words, the ability to identify with a group and achieve a sense of belonging plays a major role in developing an individual's relationship with a sport.

Participants in this study discussed feelings of loneliness and isolation during their boxing careers as a result of the lack of female boxers in their respective gyms. All

30 of the female boxers interviewed stated that their gyms consisted of mostly men and that they trained with men more often than women. During the interviews, six participants spoke about feeling a lack of connection with their fellow gym members and attributed it to their gender. These participants expressed their feelings of a lack of belonging by explicitly using variations of the words “lonely,” “outside,” “excluded,” “isolated,” and “left out” when discussing their boxing experiences. Furthermore, they stated that they believed that their gender contributed to their inability to achieve a close connection with their male peers. In addition to these six participants, 11 stated that while they did not necessarily feel isolated from their male training partners, they would prefer to have more women in the gym so that they could also belong to a group of people who shared their unique experiences as female boxers.

Kayla, an amateur boxer, explained how she felt a limited connection with the male boxers in her gym:

It’s not like they’re mean to me or try to make me feel different, but it’s really a small talk kind of situation. Well, more than small talk, but the guys are all really tight [holds up hand with first two fingers crossed]. They get together on the weekends, grab some food after practice, and really are like brothers. I feel like I’m the sister you love, but don’t really want to hang out with.

Her account shows that while she has formed a bond with her male teammates, it is to a limited degree, especially when compared to the strength of the relationships among the men. Professional boxer, Natalie, offered a similar experience and emphasised the fact that boxing is a sport that can cause feelings of isolation without the addition of gender:

[Boxing] is the loneliest sport there is. You’re constantly in your own mind, you have to cut back on socialising, your friends and family don’t understand the dieting, and they don’t even understand why you do something where you get

bashed in the face. People can't really relate if they haven't [boxed]. I'm kind of jealous the guys have each other to relate to. Don't get me wrong; understand the fight life, but they can't relate to me as a girl. I can't tell them, "[m]y weight isn't going down because I'm PMS-ing this week" or that my boyfriend and I had a big fight, and I was up all night crying. They talk about their life problems with each other, but it would be too weird if I did it.

Natalie explains that it is not unusual for boxers to feel a sense of isolation or distinctiveness from their social circles outside of the sport. However, she maintains that male boxers have the privilege of belonging to a group of people who share a similar experience. As a female boxer, she is not afforded the same convenience.

Vanessa's comments supported Natalie's claim that female boxers have different experiences and perspectives that limit their ability to fully integrate into the male-dominated group. She said, "[i]t would be nice to have some more girls around. Someone to talk about the struggles of a weight cut, I totally think [cutting weight is] harder for girls, and the pressure of keeping up with the boys. Just someone to relate to would be nice." These examples show that not only do female boxers lack a sense of camaraderie, but it is something that they would like to experience within the sport.

Participants indicated that gendered perceptions played a role in their inability to fully assimilate into the close groups of male boxers in their gyms. In Chapter IV section 3.2, a male boxer stated that he felt his female teammate did not "earn" her place on the team. His female teammate, Maya, explained that she was aware of his beliefs and that other members of the team shared them. She said:

I know they don't think I belong here. They haven't said it to my face, but I can pick up on it. If they don't want me here, they're not gonna want to get to know

me so I don't talk to them much. It kind of sucks, but whatever; just have to prove [myself] in the ring.

Maya did not attempt, or ceased her attempts, to build meaningful relationships with her male teammates because she felt that she would be shunned due to their belief that she lacked adequate boxing skills.

Marina, who described her experience with unwanted sexual attention in Chapter IV section 5.1, attributed gendered perceived motivations as the reason why she chose not to actively attempt to bond with her male teammates. According to Marina, she was worried that her attempts to form friendships would come across as flirting:

I was nervous when I first started coming in to the gym. One, that I would look like an idiot, and two, that I would pee my pants when I got punched [laughter].

Once I got over those things, I felt comfortable in here, but I kept to myself. So many times, when I'm talking to a guy, I'm just talking to him, you know, but he thinks I'm hitting on him. So I was scared the guys in here would think I was flirting with them, and it didn't help that a few of them did have a go at me when

I first started, and that I would be seen as just a chick who was trying to pick-up.

The sexualisation of female boxers, as well as the idea that they are motivated by the opportunity to be in a male-dominated environment, influenced Marina's decision to avoid connecting with her peers. She limited her interactions with her prospective comrades in order to maintain her boxing credibility.

Achieving a sense of belonging has been highlighted as a critical element in an individual's attachment process. Although their study investigated fan attachment to a sport's team, de Groot and Robinson (2008) emphasise socialisation and a sense of belongingness as the greatest benefits of the attachment process. They argue, "[t]he safety and comfort of a group, the feeling you are with like-minded people creates an

opportunity for an individual to enhance his self-image... friends are made and because of this common interest and shared emotions the bond is deep and a strong sense of affinity develops” (de Groot & Robinson, 2008, p. 135). Thus, if there is a lack of meaningful relationships, the attachment process could be negatively affected. As the previous comments demonstrate, female boxers not only lack this desirable sense of belonging, but they actually feel excluded from the group.

Filo et al. (2009) support the importance of belonging to a group in developing attachment, but in the context of participants. They found that camaraderie was highly valued amongst participants in their study. The current study found that participants did indeed value the idea of bonding with people of similar interest and experiences, in this case female boxers, but they had not been able to achieve that connection due to gender barriers. It has been recognised that female sport participants highly value the idea of a shared experience, and this is a key factor in deciding to participate in a sport (Evans, 2013). In her study on female fitness boot camp participants, Evans (2013) found that nearly half of the subjects participated with a friend, which contributed to their enjoyment of the activity. Female boxers, however, do not have this experience as they participate in a male-dominated sport and train in mixed gender environments. This actually contributes to creating a contrasting feeling of isolation or distinctiveness. Therefore, female boxers encounter more difficulty than their male counterparts when trying to achieve a sense of belonging.

These findings are similar to those of Cove and Young (2007) in that the notion of the “old boys’ club” still exists within boxing. This study extends their argument because it is more than an existing mentality that devalues female boxers, but a practice that limits female boxers’ abilities to achieve a sense of belonging among their fellow gym members. As an emphasised factor in developing attachment, the lack of shared

experience alters the attachment process for female boxers. It is possible their connection is not as strong as participants who benefit from a sense of belonging. Additionally, the sense of not belonging can potentially outweigh the rewards of participation and sway participants towards ambivalence.

4. Summary

This chapter presented the ways in which perceptions of female boxers affect their connections to the sport. By utilising the PCM as a tool to gain a better understanding, this study found that perceptions could either positively influence the development of allegiance or push participants towards feelings of ambivalence. Empowerment, escape, and individualisation were identified as personal meanings that demonstrated the sport held intrinsic value to participants. Furthermore, data revealed that centrality and external actions were not just indicators of attachment, but also ways for female boxers to counter trivialising perceptions by showing their commitment to the sport.

On the other hand, some participants indicated movement towards a stage of ambivalence. This movement, or potential movement, was influenced by negative experiences that they associated with boxing. The desire to maintain a feminine image while identifying as a boxer, sustaining excessive injuries, and the lack of female camaraderie contributed to participants' negative feelings towards the sport. This placed them in a "vulnerable" position (Weiss & Weiss, 2003), as they could be swayed towards ambivalence and possible disengagement or back towards attachment.

This chapter has demonstrated that perceptions do have an impact on female boxers' connections to the sport. The effect has the potential to be problematic for the

development of the sport if female boxers are routinely swayed towards ambivalence and disengagement.

Chapter VII

Conclusions

1. Introduction

It was established earlier in this thesis that women's boxing is a relatively new sport, despite women participating in bare-knuckled bouts in the eighteenth century (Smith, 2014). Early research in the area found that female boxers were subjected to stereotypical perceptions and gender discrimination as a result of participating in a sport that is often depicted as the epitome of masculinity (Halbert, 1997; Hargreaves, 1997). Later studies investigating issues in the sport highlighted the experiences of female boxers (Lafferty & McKay, 2004; Mennesson, 2000). However, the effects of perceptions on female boxers' psychological connections to the sport had not been explored. The overarching goal of this study was to fill that gap and extend the current literature about women's boxing. The final chapter of this thesis presents a summary of the study's major findings, then moves on to present conclusions, and suggestions for future research.

2. Summary of the Findings

This study identified four common perceptions of female boxers. These perceptions are: 1) the female boxers as invisible; 2) the female boxer as an illegitimate athlete; 3) the female boxer as unfeminine; and, 4) the female boxer as a sexualised character.

The participants in this study explained that they are often confronted by a general lack of awareness of women's boxing, leading to the perception of female boxers as invisible. This is due to either unawareness of women's boxing as an organised, competitive sport or the belief that boxing is strictly a male domain. While the symbolic annihilation of women's sports in the media has largely contributed to unawareness of female athletes (McKay, 1991), this study surprisingly found that

female boxers received adequate media coverage at the 2012 London Olympic Games. This finding contrasts recent studies that have found that media coverage of women's sport is extremely low compared to men's (Cooky et al., 2013; Cooky et al., 2015). Furthermore, the media attention given to women's boxing juxtaposes the notion that the media largely ignores women in traditionally "masculine" sports (Hardin & Greer, 2009). However, it is acknowledged that this study used newspaper articles covering the Olympic debut of women's boxing, and future research is suggested in the following section.

Boxing culture plays a large role in the promulgation of the perception of female boxers as invisible as it upholds the sport as an exclusively masculine space. Shared beliefs and behaviours within the sport continue to marginalise female boxers to the extent that an outsider might assume women are not part of the culture at all. The inclusion of women in the sport has generally consisted of women gaining the opportunity to box and participate in the culture. As Dortants and Knoppers' (2012) found, boxing gyms attempting to practice gender neutrality still maintain gendered practices and beliefs because the way of thinking has not changed. Rather, women enter the space and adapt to the existing culture. This study found similar situations in that boxing communities attempt to create gender neutral spaces, but they still do not acknowledge their presence in a way that practices neutrality. Thus, it could be beneficial to value gender awareness rather than gender neutrality within the sport. Since women are relatively new to the sport in terms of the right to participate, they are not entering the sport from a position that allows for neutrality.

Women's boxing is trivialised by a prevailing perception that female boxers are illegitimate athletes. It is assumed that female boxers do not participate in "real" boxing, implying that women's boxing is subpar to men's, or that they are "token" athletes,

which refers to them as undeserving based on a presumed lack of athletic skills. This study found that the media coverage of the women's Olympic boxing events did in fact promote this concept, which aligns with the common practice of trivialising women's sport (Bruce, 1998; Harrison & Secarea, 2010). Female boxers were critiqued for the small number of matches that they were required to win before receiving a medal. They were praised for their participation, even if they lost, and it was suggested that they should be content with taking part in the competition.

The perception of female boxers as unfeminine demonstrates the hegemonic notions of gender that continue to shape society's views of women in sport. As women participating in an extremely masculinised sport, female boxers are often automatically assumed to be lesbians. Additionally, they are often criticised for having muscular bodies even though that is a means of earning respect for male boxers. In order to overcome the juxtaposition that is a woman boxing, media coverage tended to present female boxers as excessively violent. However, at the same time women boxers demonstrated the feminine apologetic and emphasised traits of hegemonic femininity, which implies that they would be thought of as masculine without such intervention. This finding suggests that even though the sport has grown significantly since Halbert's (1997) study, female boxers continue to strive to counter perceptions of unfemininity by emphasising displays of hegemonic femininity. Similar to Halbert's (1997) findings, many female boxers rely on their physical appearances to achieve this.

Participant observation revealed that in their inadequate attempts to incorporate women into the gym, members of the boxing community made female boxers feel that they were viewed as unfeminine. Yet, female boxers attempting to "play the part" explained that they adopted what they believed were masculine characteristics and unintentionally reinforced this perception.

Finally, the sexualisation of female athletes is indeed a phenomenon that exists within women's boxing. The hypersexualisation of female boxers not only trivialises their athletic endeavours, but also subjects them to unwanted sexual attention and harassment. Surprisingly, the media coverage of women's Olympic boxing events did not overtly sexualise female boxers, which still occurs (Cooky et al., 2013). Boxing culture also did not blatantly hypersexualise female boxers as "foxee" boxers, but practices of sexually objectifying women in the sport did occur, which endorses female boxers as sexualised characters. This study did find that by attempting to counter perceptions of "manliness," female boxers chose to display their heterosexuality or femininity in ways that promote the perception of female boxers as sexualised characters.

Once these perceptions were identified, the PCM was utilised as a tool to better understand the ways such perceptions affect the psychological connections between female boxers and the sport. The findings indicate that perceptions negatively portraying female boxers act as a motivating factor for participants to display their commitment to the sport. Physical and mental empowerment gained through boxing participation created personal meaning for many participants. Personal meaning is significant because it indicates an individual's attachment or allegiance to a sport (Funk & James, 2006). This study found that women who participate in boxing experience feelings of empowerment, which is similar to studies using other forms of combat sport (MCAughy, 1997; Velija et al., 2013). They also attempted to dispel trivialising perceptions making boxing a central focus in their lives and altering their external actions. On the other hand, some participants implied regressive movement through the PCM as they swayed towards the stage of ambivalence. Weiss and Weiss (2003) found that participants can experience both positive and negative feelings toward a sport and

determined that these individuals are in a “vulnerable” position because they are at risk of disengagement. Since this study did not measure feelings of ambivalence, it cannot be said if participants were in the stage of ambivalence. However, presenting both positive and negative feelings, which is similar to Weiss and Weiss’ (2003) findings, suggests that some female boxers are in a position where they might be debating their continuation in the sport.

3. Conclusions

Women’s boxing has come a long way since the eighteenth century when bare-chested “she-devils” brawled for the entertainment of rowdy crowds (Smith, 2014). The sport has grown in participation rates, reached the largest world stage in sport, and is more accessible than ever before (Jennings, 2014). Woodward (2013) even argues that the opportunity to change the discourse of women’s boxing presented itself after the sport’s Olympic debut at the 2012 London Olympic Games. This study, however, found that such a change has yet to take place. The current perceptions of female boxers are still reflective of the gendered stereotypes, trivialisation, and marginalisation that have plagued women in sport.

This study has revealed that although the sport is becoming more accessible to women, boxing is preserved as a male domain and women are being marginalised to its outskirts. Boxing remains as, “one of the very few social contexts in which archaic notions of physical, violent, self-contained masculinity continue to be performed and embodied,” (Lindner, 2012, p. 465) and it is clear that the maintenance of this context is important to those within the sport. Comparing the men’s and women’s boxing events at the 2012 London Olympic Games, which included 250 events for men compared to 36

for women, provides evidence that while the sport is letting women in, it is actively limiting their presence.

Even when they have gained entry, female boxers are continually marked as the “other” and their distinctiveness is emphasised. By enforcing rules that require women to fight shorter rounds and attempting to implement uniforms with skirts at the 2012 London Olympic Games (Woodward, 2014), governing bodies continually perpetuate the notion that female boxers are not the norm. This is significant because without any challenges to the status quo, gendered beliefs and practices continue to circulate at the organisational level at the cost of female boxers.

While the boxing community might be receptive to the addition of female boxers, as evidenced by the researcher’s experiences in the field, gendered beliefs, values, and practices are ingrained in boxing culture. As demonstrated at Gym X, intention might reflect gender equality, but practices unknowingly reproduce hegemonic gender norms. Similar to Dortants and Knoppers’ (2012) study, the value of gender neutrality is a desired value within the gym. While the gym’s members, trainers, and owners believe they are promoting gender neutrality, they differentiate between men and women in ways that enforce Western society’s gender hierarchy.

For example, the changing space at Gym X is considered to be gender neutral and a shared area. However, the male boxers practice inherent privilege by assuming the right to the space without question. While it is possible that they have not considered that any women present might be uncomfortable, that is another benefit of male privilege. They have access to the space without hesitation. Female gym members, on the other hand, automatically sacrifice their use of the space. The fact that a designated gender neutral space is actually not gender neutral demonstrates the difference between

a desired value and a practiced value. The hierarchy of the gender binary is intrinsically replicated in the boxing gym.

The distribution of bodily capital is another point of conflict for female boxers. While the female athlete's body is contested terrain for women in all sports (Jones & Greer, 2011; Krane, 2001; Krane et al., 2004; Malcolm, 2003), the female boxer's body is especially unique because of the value that is placed on the boxer's body. As Wacquant (1995) explains, "[f]rom the time he first steps into a gym till the day he 'hangs up' his gloves and retires from the trade, the body of the boxer is the focus of unremitting attention" (p. 68). Boxers, and Wacquant's (1995) use of the word "he" should be noted, are granted respect and privilege through the presentation of their bodies (Paradis, 2012).

The body that gains capital in boxing, however, is a stark contrast to the body that is valued by hegemonic femininity, which, "has a strong emphasis on appearance with the dominant notion of an ideal feminine body as thin and toned" (Krane et al., 2004). The female boxer, then, is asked to choose which capital she values more. She is not afforded the luxury given to male boxers, where the prized body is valued both in and out of the boxing world. In a sport where participants strip down to their underwear and are displayed on a stage at weigh-ins, female boxers cannot escape the focus on their bodies and the anomaly they present. Even if a female boxer possesses a body that in theory should grant her bodily capital in the gym, she may still be perceived as inconsistent with values of hegemonic femininity and not granted respect. This was the case presented in Chapter IV section 4.1 when a female boxer was told to, "[g]et off the juice!"

Sport has served as both a reflection of and influence on social policies in society, and this is especially true for boxing and boxers. According to Sammons (1988,

p. 31), “[s]ince prizefighting has been characterized by some as a true test of skill, courage, intelligence, and manhood, boxing champions have traditionally stood as symbols of national and racial superiority.” Oppressed ethnic, racial, and religious communities have used the sport as a platform to call attention to areas of social injustice, and audiences have held boxing heroes representing these groups in high respect. Yet, women in boxing have not had the same experience, reflecting the unevenness of social change within sport. One reason for this could be the fact that women are not actually fighting their oppressors in the ring. Male boxers of oppressed communities are able to physically fight and overcome their oppressors in the ring, which provides a symbolic victory that audiences can visually witness. For example, African-American boxer Jack Johnson defeated a white title holder to become the first world heavyweight champion of colour (Sammons, 1988) and Jewish-American heavyweight Max Baer defeated Germany’s Max Schmeling, who was endorsed by Adolf Hitler (Sugden, 1996). Female boxers, however, do not fight their oppressors, as boxing practices sport’s tradition of separating men and women. This is not an argument for men and women to compete together, but rather an insight into perhaps why the sport has not welcomed women as it has with other oppressed communities.

The hegemonic gender norms that are continually reinforced through sport, the media, culture, and agency preserve the masculinity that is valued in boxing and contribute to the perceptions that trivialise and marginalise female boxers. This trivialisation and marginalisation then affects their relationship with the sport, which can be either improved or damaged by these perceptions. This study found that the desire to disprove negative perceptions is a driving force behind the development of attachment and allegiance among female boxers. These findings extend the current literature on the PCM, as centrality and external actions were not just indicators of

attachment, but used as platforms to showcase commitment to the sport. Female boxers utilised these characteristics to prove that they were “real” boxers. They were conscious decisions made with the intent to demonstrate commitment and products of an organic attachment process. Additionally, this study provides evidence that gender does contribute to a participant’s development, or lack of development, of attachment to a sport. Funk and James (2006) suggested the need for research that investigates the influence of gender on an individual’s connection to a sport. This study, while deepening our knowledge of the influence of gendered perceptions on connection to sport, supports their recommendation that further research is needed.

On the other hand, trivialising and marginalising perceptions were also shown to lead female boxers to become “vulnerable athletes,” which means they occupy a critical space where they could be swayed towards ambivalence (Weiss & Weiss, 2003). The frustrations of trying to balance their identities as boxers with the expectations of femininity, the physical demands of the sport, and feelings of isolation, can result in negative feelings towards the sport. Since the conclusion of this study’s data collection, five participants have disengaged from the sport for reasons including health related issues and lack of opportunities. If female boxers are at a place of potential ambivalence, or actually at the ambivalence stage, then clearly change is necessary that negates the causes of ambivalence. Women’s boxing is at a critical stage where it has finally emerged in the global spotlight and the potential for significant development is apparent. However, this is not possible if female boxers’ ambivalence leads them to leave the sport due to the continual reproduction of gendered perceptions.

This leads to this study’s practical implications. The PCM has been utilised as an efficient segmentation tool (Beaton et al., 2009; Funk et al., 2011). It is recommended that it is used to identify female boxers in vulnerable and ambivalence stages as a way

to target participants who might be swayed towards disengagement. By identifying these participants, actions can be taken that can encourage actual change and continued participation in the sport.

Another practical implication resulting from this study is to incorporate gender tolerance training in gyms and coaching credential courses. This study found that female boxers lack a sense of belonging, which is instrumental to achieving and maintaining attachment (Evans, 2013; Filo et al., 2009). It was also found that women are hesitant to voice their concerns in the gym, and face physical difficulties not usually experienced by male boxers. Thus, it appears that in their efforts to practice gender neutrality, gyms and members of the boxing community actually ignore gender issues, which allow them to prevail. Female boxers integrating into the gym is still a relatively new phenomenon, especially when compared to the existence of boxing and as with all cultures, adjustment takes time. Therefore, most within the boxing community are inexperienced with issues of gender and lack the knowledge to acknowledge gender differences without promoting hegemonic gender norms. Thus, educating people within the sport, especially those in positions of power, can help female boxers maintain attachment, and generally contribute to ongoing cultural change.

4. Suggestions for Future Research

There are multiple suggestions for future research to further contribute to the development of women's boxing. Firstly, this study did not account for intersectionality. This theory maintains that forms of conceptualised oppression are not mutually exclusive and actually intersect, which contributes to systemic inequality (Crenshaw, 1991). A broader textbook definition of intersectionality outlines it as, "the interplay of race, class, and gender, often resulting in multiple dimensions of disadvantage"

(Macionis & Gerber, 2011, p. 310). However, other concepts such as sexuality, ethnicity, ability, and religion are also incorporated in intersectionality. Ultimately, this theory suggests that systemic gender oppression cannot be separated from other forms of oppression. Therefore, a gendered experience is not exclusive of other systems of oppression.

This study could not take into account these considerations and only addressed the gender of participants. However, this study opened the door for future research. Many sociological studies have explored some of these social concepts within the sport, especially in areas of race and class, but have focused solely on male boxers (Cooley, 2010; Hare, 1971; Weinberg & Around, 1952). Future studies in women's boxing should investigate what role intersectionality plays in the sport.

Secondly, a study regarding the media coverage of women's boxing at the 2016 Rio Olympic Games is recommended. This study used media coverage of 2012 London Olympic Games because the event removed several variables that could have potentially affected the data. However, it is acknowledged that women's boxing made its Olympic debut at the 2012 London Olympic Games. Therefore, further research investigating the media coverage of the upcoming Olympic Games is suggested. Findings can then be compared to uncover consistencies or inconsistencies.

Thirdly, it is suggested that future research incorporates multiple boxing gyms as sites for participant observation. Participant observation and ethnography are methods that have been used in multiple studies in the area of women's boxing (Lafferty & McKay, 2004; Paradis, 2012). All of these studies, however, take place at a boxing gym, most likely due to the amount of time it takes to gain access to a site. The use of multiple boxing gyms can offer further insight that has is yet to be revealed yet.

Lastly, studies implementing the PCM could provide insight that can contribute to the development of the sport. Identifying female boxers in stages of ambivalence and disengagement can help pinpoint factors that might discourage women from participating. This study found that some participants are at risk of occupying the stage of ambivalence and could potentially disengage from the sport. By recognising why female boxers reach this stage, the sport can take necessary action to encourage movement towards attachment and allegiance.

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APPENDIX A

List of Interview Questions

- 1) Background Questions:
 - a. Age, hometown, occupation
 - b. What sports have you competed in?
 - c. What type of boxing do you do?
 - d. How did you get involved in boxing?
- 2) What was your perception of boxing, and women's boxing in particular, before you entered the sport? Did you have any exposure to the sport before you began?
 - a. Has that perception changed since you have become involved in the sport?
Why or why not? How so?
- 3) How do people usually react when they find out you are a boxer?
- 4) How do reactions change, if at all, depending on the environment of the interaction?
- 5) How do you respond to these reactions?
- 6) How do you feel you were received when you joined your boxing gym?
- 7) How do you think the general public views female boxers?
 - a. Why do you think people view female boxers that way? Do you think this view is accurate?
- 8) How do you see women's boxing portrayed in the media?
- 9) Please describe your gym.
 - a. Who do you usually train with? What are the physical features? How do you interact with other gym members?
- 10) Do you identify as a boxer? In your opinion, what makes someone a "boxer?"
- 11) In your opinion, what makes someone a "boxer?"
 - a. How do you think others in the sport define a "boxer?"
 - b. How do you think people outside of the sport define a "boxer?"
- 12) How has boxing affected your life?
- 13) What are your goals in the sport?
- 14) Would you like to see any changes in the sport? If yes, what are they?

APPENDIX B

Explanatory Statement



Explanatory Statement

April 16, 2012

A Critical Analysis of Women's Boxing RO1482

This letter is for you to keep.

My name is Christine Aiken, and I am conducting a research project under the supervision of Professor Shayne Quick within the Faculty of Health Sciences and Medicine at Bond University. The purpose of this study is to offer a critical analysis of women's sport by focusing on women's boxing and the experiences of female fighters.

I have chosen to focus on women's boxing because it serves as an intersection of a heavily masculinised sport and our society's popular notions of gender. Your role in the boxing community, therefore, makes you a desirable participant for this study. There are not any direct benefits for people who take part in this research, but the project and final publication will bring recognition to the sport.

Your role in this study will consist primarily of an interview lasting approximately one hour. I might contact you at a later date with possible follow-up questions if you allow me to do so. The interview will be recorded and transcribed, and all data will be stored in accordance with Bond University regulations in order to protect your privacy. You will be given an alias so that your name will not be connected to the data, and you will remain anonymous to everyone involved in the study besides myself. Participation in this study is strictly voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to take part. You may withdraw from further participation at any point in the study.

If you have any questions or concerns about any aspect of this study, please contact the researcher:	If you have a complaint regarding the conduction of this research RO1482, please contact:
Christine Aiken Tel: +61 7 5595 4120 Mobile: +61 (0) 420 571 572 Email: caiken@bond.edu.au	The Research Ethics Coordinator Office of Research Services Building 7, Level 1 Bond University QLD 4229 Tel: +61 7 5595 4194 Fax: +61 7 5595 1120

APPENDIX C

Consent Form



Consent Form for Research Participants

A Critical Analysis of Women's Boxing

RO 1482

Researcher: Christine Aiken, PhD Candidate, Bond University

1. I, _____, hereby consent to participate in the research project "A Critical Analysis of Women's Boxing."
2. I have obtained, read, and fully understand the explanatory statement for this project.
3. I am fully aware of any possible risks and benefits that might affect me as a result of my participation.
4. I understand that if I agree to participate in this research, I will be taking part in an hour-long interview and possibly contacted at a later date with follow-up questions.
5. I understand that all data collected will be stored in accordance with Bond University regulations. Data will be stored under an alias so that my identity will not be known to anyone except the interviewer.
6. I understand that I can withdraw from the project at any stage without penalty.
7. My consent is fully given, and I do so under no obligation.

Signed _____ Date _____

Researcher to Complete

I, _____, have explained the purpose of this study and the process of participation to _____ and fully believe that he/she understands what is involved.

To address any concerns regarding the nature or conduct of the research, please contact:

The Research Ethics Coordinator

Office of Research Services

Building 7, Level 1

Bond University QLD 4229

Tel: +61 7 5595 4194

Fax: +61 7 5595 1120